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by G. K. Chesterton

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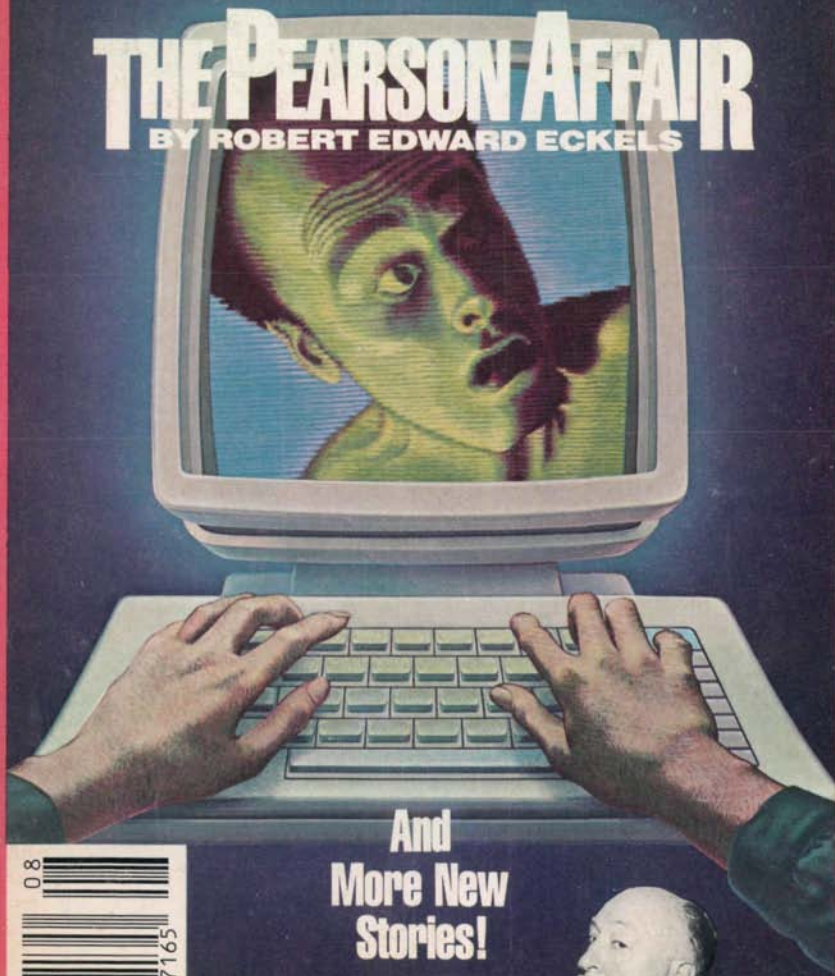
HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

August, 1983

THE PEARSON AFFAIR

BY ROBERT EDWARD ECKELS



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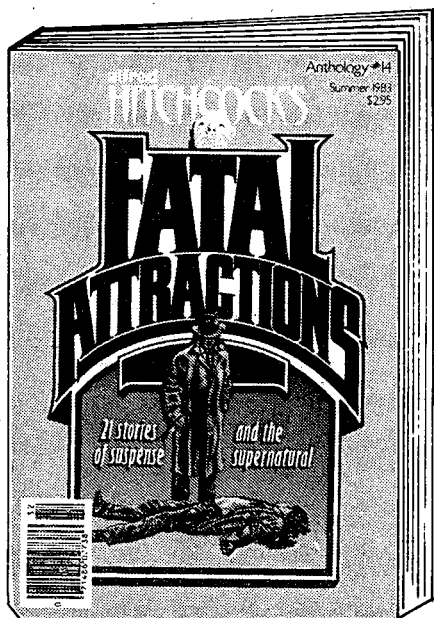
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EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

This issue of AHMM inaugurates something new, and something we hope you will enjoy. It's a column called "Off the Record," and it will alternate, though irregularly, with Cases on File.

Cases on File has, in general, recounted unsolved mysteries of the past. Off the Record gives us a chance to let fiction writers and others talk about the mystery story itself, and to throw some interesting sidelights on it. To start things off, we have an entry that's a little different—in the sense that it incorporates art as well as written observation. For Barbara Byfield, its author, is talented in at least two directions, and for years we've admired a particular set of drawings she had tucked away. We've prevailed upon her to expand them, to add a text, and to share them with us all. And we've been as enchanted with the results as we

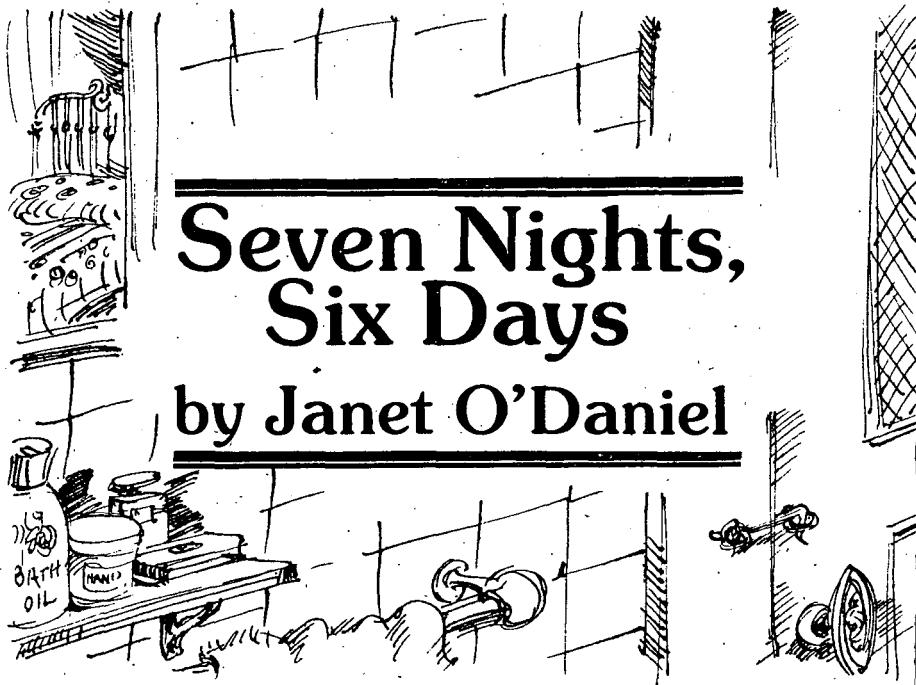
thought we would be.

Ms. Byfield, you may recall, has to date written two stories for AHMM ("The Blushing Bride," August, 1982, and "Poison Clean," May, 1983). Her prior credits include a string of mystery novels published by the Doubleday Crime Club; a delightful compendium of the fantastical, explicated in text and drawings, called *The Glass Harmonica* as a hardcover, *The Book of Weird* as a paperback; and a series of juveniles. She has also written *The Eating-in-Bed Cookbook* and has illustrated a number of children's stories by other authors.

For the rest, we'd like to add only that Booked & Printed is only temporarily absent from our pages and will be back next month—and that we are especially pleased to have new stories by Robert Edward Eckels and Ann F. Woodward, both too long away from AHMM.

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Seven Nights, Six Days

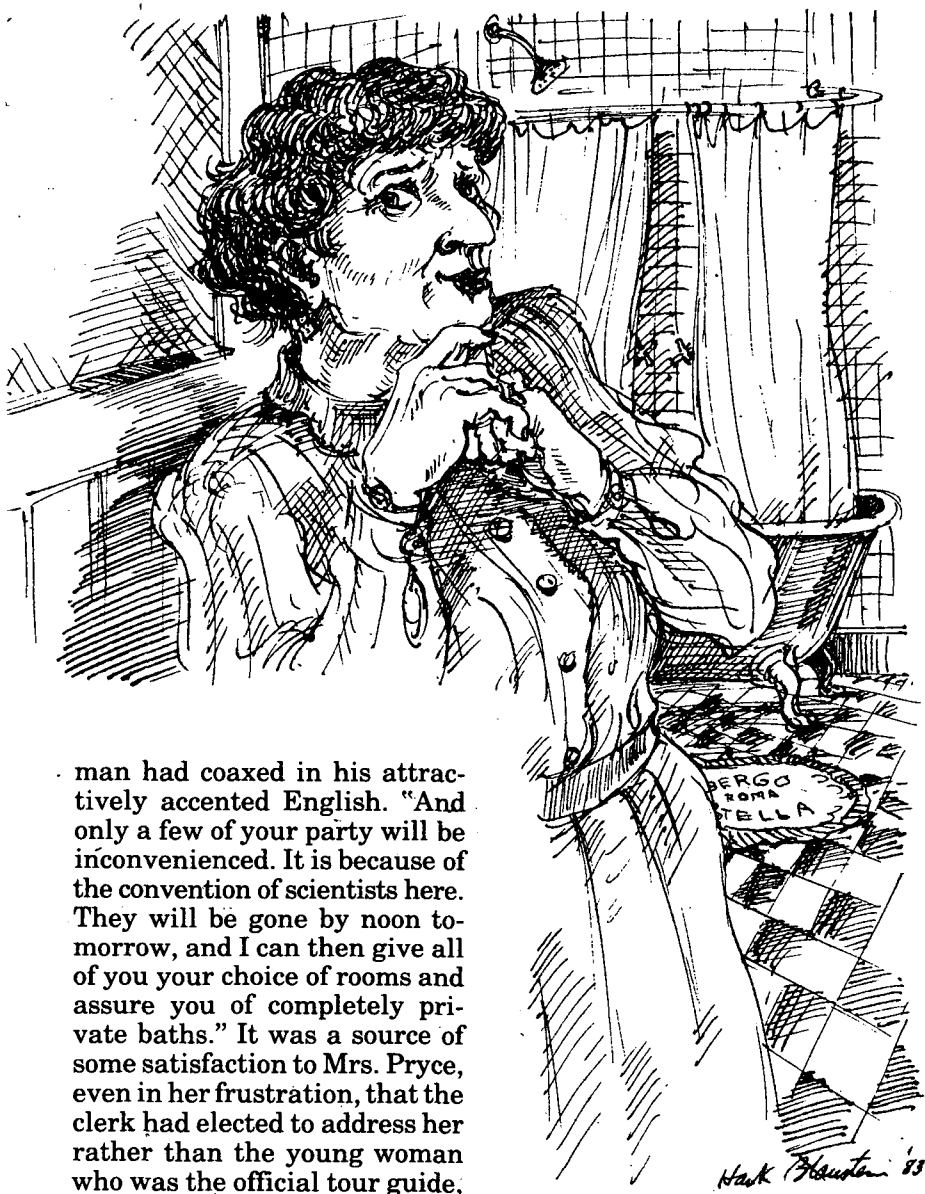
by Janet O'Daniel

The small mixup at the hotel desk when they arrived was certainly annoying, but had not seemed—at first—in any way sinister. In fact, Harriet Pryce was inclined to put it down to nothing more than the laxness of Italian management. Not that the Stella wasn't a perfectly comfortable hotel, and preferable, in her opinion, to the newer, more vulgar ones farther down the Via Veneto. This one, at the top of the street near the

Borghese Gardens, had a well-used look of quality that Mrs. Pryce approved of. Marble steps slightly worn down in the centers, good red carpeting in the lobby, twelve-foot ceilings. Still, management was another matter. And that *contretemps* at the desk *had* disturbed her.

"I do not intend to share a bath with anyone," Mrs. Pryce had snapped at the apologetic room clerk.

"It would be for one night only, Signora Pryce," the young



man had coaxed in his attractively accented English. "And only a few of your party will be inconvenienced. It is because of the convention of scientists here. They will be gone by noon tomorrow, and I can then give all of you your choice of rooms and assure you of completely private baths." It was a source of some satisfaction to Mrs. Pryce, even in her frustration, that the clerk had elected to address her rather than the young woman who was the official tour guide,

and who now stood beside her in wavering dismay. Against her better judgment then, Mrs. Pryce had acquiesced. Rome was warm in mid-May. She was weary. She was longing to sink into a tub. Still, she summoned up a sharp parting salvo. "I shall take it up with the tour company the moment I return home. You people should not be allowed to bully us simply because we're good-natured Americans." The little guide looked concerned, then relieved, as the matter appeared to be settling.

Mrs. Pryce glanced around at the straggle of tour members standing behind her at the desk, all of them warm and spent after the ride in the bus from the airport. "'Hobson's choice—take that or none,'" she quoted darkly, and led the way to the elevators. She had felt compelled to make a show of resistance since she had, from the outset, sensed herself to be the unofficial but tacitly acknowledged leader of the tour. The guide had met them at Fiumicino, of course—this thin young woman with blonde hair and brown eyes. Scarcely more than a child, to Mrs. Pryce's mind. But by that time Mrs. Pryce, an old hand at tours, had already whipped the fourteen wavering and bemused travelers into a unit as cohesive as a

well-run army platoon.

"There will be someone to meet us," she had reassured them as they left the plane. "Watch for a sign—someone will be holding up a sign saying Prestige Tours." "No, no. Don't be concerned about your luggage, they'll take care of it." "The ladies' room? Just over there, as I recall. And don't worry about missing the bus. I shall make sure it's held for you." She had, in sum, been a tower of strength to the fourteen, none of whom had been in Italy before, and none veteran tourists like herself.

It was this matter of trust that she felt had been violated in the matter of the room assignments: her powerlessness to alter the situation made her feel in some way diminished as a leader. She was somewhat consoled when Mrs. Benning, pale and tired-looking, touched her elbow and thanked her as they parted before the doors of their adjoining rooms. "I can't think what we'd have done without you, Mrs. Pryce. You've been so helpful."

Her husband echoed her. "Yes, indeed. Very helpful." He was small and quiet like his wife. An inoffensive pair—good people, Mrs. Pryce decided, slipping them into a slot so labeled in her mind. And it was fortunate, actually, that they were

to be her neighbors. Sharing the bath with them would not be too distasteful.

Once in her room, however, she discovered that the bathroom door was, unhappily, to the right, not to the left where the Bennings were. She was to be thrown in with strangers after all, then. Mrs. Pryce's forehead gathered in a frown. She glanced around the room, noting the heavy wooden bed, the numerous chairs—there were always too many chairs—the worn, defeated-looking rug. Then she crossed to the bathroom door and pushed it open quietly. White-tiled, unremarkable. Overlarge, as bathrooms were apt to be in these older places—a not displeasing feature. A second door was opposite her: obviously it led to the next room and her unknown neighbors. As she stood there she heard voices from beyond it and moved closer to listen. They were women's voices, two of them, and decidedly British—both raised in what sounded like agitation. Mrs. Pryce sensed an argument and tilted her head forward, its angle alert and attentive.

"Really, Grace—you've said the same thing twenty times over. I wish you'd let it rest."

"Sorry if I've been tedious. I'm sure I never meant to burden you."

"I didn't say you were tedious, dear. It's simply that it's no good saying it over and over. And who's going to listen—except me? He's a very important man in the field."

"Oh, of course. No mystery how he came to be so. Anyone could build up quite a shelf of publications if he stole regularly from his colleagues."

"Darling, what a word to use. You mustn't, you know. Dr. Brand's terribly well thought of in the field."

"Oh, for God's sake—I hate it when you talk about the *field*. And certainly he's well thought of—by all those devoted associates of his!" Venom overflowed the room, seeped under the bathroom door. "It makes me absolutely livid, Violet, when I see you running to fetch his tea and then standing there panting like a dog as you wait for a smile from the great man. And I'm sure if he suggested that you hop into bed with him you'd do that, too—if you haven't already—"

"Grace Harwood!"

"You, with your background in scholarship and research, toadying to someone like that—"

"You're absolutely round the bend over this, Grace. Overlooking those beastly things you're saying about me, it's most irresponsible of you to malign Dr. Brand this way. All

scholars borrow from one another's finds, surely—build upon them, at any rate."

"They don't steal papers from staff members and pass them off as their own! That Macedonian research was mine, word for word!"

"Really, Grace, you're being a most awful bore about all this. After a time you'll come to see how you've overstated everything and you'll feel a really prize fool. I myself consider us both lucky to be working with such a big man in the f—in our profession."

The voice belonging to the one called Grace replied with a short pithy word that brought color to Mrs. Pryce's cheeks. Much as she would have liked to go on listening, she feared one of the two might come bursting into the bathroom and discover her, so she hastily turned on a loud gush of water in the tub. When she turned it off after a moment, the voices were still. Mrs. Pryce went to the closed door and knocked.

The woman who answered was in her early thirties, tall, with straight brown hair cut shoulder length. She wore oversized eyeglasses. Yet, strangely, neither the straight hair nor the glasses made her look plain. Different, rather, and striking. Behind her Mrs. Pryce could see the other woman lighting

a cigarette. She was darker and her thick, tightly curled hair lay close to her head. Her features were drawn into a scowl which indicated quite clearly that she was Grace.

"I do beg your pardon," Mrs. Pryce said crisply, "but I've been assigned this adjoining room—for tonight only—so I'm afraid we'll be sharing the bath."

The brown-haired woman managed a stab at looking cordial. "Oh, fine. No one's had that room all week. But it's quite all right. We'll be leaving tomorrow anyway."

Mrs. Pryce essayed a random shot. "Are you by chance with the convention of scientists?"

"Oh—well, archaeologists, actually."

"Archaeologists! How fascinating!" Mrs. Pryce paused, straightening out archaeology in her mind. Not primitive tribes—that was the other one. It was ruins, digging for artifacts. "I'm Harriet Pryce, by the way."

"How do you do," the young woman answered. Then, without enthusiasm, "I'm Violet and this is Grace."

Mrs. Pryce, nodding cordially, did not say that she knew this already. In the background, dark-haired Grace was glaring at her with a malice that seemed to Mrs. Pryce quite uncalled for. Nevertheless, she

herself stayed calm and dignified. Dignity, she felt, could usually carry the day.

"I wonder if I might have a quick bath now—without putting you out?"

"Help yourself," tall Violet said.

"Thank you. I've just arrived in Rome—from the U.S.?—and the dust of travel, you know."

Grace's eyes moved toward the ceiling. "Yes, of course," Violet said. "Do carry on."

"Suppose I—tap on the door when I'm done?" Mrs. Pryce suggested, raising a knuckled hand to illustrate.

"Jesus," Grace murmured, and Violet said hastily, "That would be fine—most considerate." Mrs. Pryce gave Grace a withering look as she withdrew.

After she had bathed and rested, she felt quite restored and, for the first time since taking off from Kennedy airport, allowed herself to put into words a guilty thought that had been lurking in one of the dustier corners of her mind. She found herself actually glad that Bernard had decided against taking the tour with her. Here she had—quite innocently—stumbled upon this splendid bit of intrigue. Tonight in the dining room or lobby she might catch sight of

the controversial Dr. Brand—no doubt he would be easy to recognize—and there would be a whole ready-made plot which she could watch unfolding. If Bernard were with her he would frown and be disapproving. None of our business, Harriet. For heaven's sake, Harriet. And he was so quick to criticize things like foreign cooking—always making remarks that mortified her, like, just bring me a soft-boiled egg if you can't manage anything else. Mrs. Pryce considered herself both worldly-tolerant and adventurous, and while she did bring along her own soap and teabags, she was willing to try anything recognizable—at least once.

Still when he had said that, about not coming along on the tour, she had put up an automatic argument.

"Not coming! But Bernard, we've been planning it all winter."

"I know, Harriet. But I've seen Rome."

"Well, yes, of course. But seeing Rome once hardly means we've tasted all its treasures. And I don't mind saying I'm terribly disappointed. Well, all right, if that's the way you feel, we'll go somewhere else. We've never done Scandinavia—"

"No no, that's not what I mean—you go ahead. I want

you to have the trip. It's just that I think I'll go to the international convention in Boston instead."

"You've always said you hated those conventions!"

"I know. But orthodontics are like anything else. If you don't keep up with the new things, you're left in the backwash. Some big men will be there. I should go, Harriet."

"Well, I'm sure I don't see why. You're five years away from retiring. You said yourself you could coast the rest of the way."

"Good God, you're ready to wheel me into a retirement home! I won't even be sixty till August, you know. I *want* to keep up, Harriet. I'm not ready to pack it in yet. Besides, you don't need me to enjoy the tour—you've always managed well by yourself."

Had there been a twist of bitterness there, or had she only imagined it? Odd behavior—not like Bernard, Mrs. Pryce thought. Yet perhaps men of that age—she paused, thinking about it. And quite possibly both of them needed to define their personal spaces a bit more clearly. She repeated the phrase to herself, deciding that it reflected a good grasp of current thinking. She slipped into her two-piece blue, surveyed her greying brown hair critically in

the mirror, and contemplated the evening ahead. An adventure, Mrs. Pryce thought, leaving the room and turning her key in the lock.

The tour had divided itself early in the trip into segments. Ten of the fifteen were couples. Two of these—in their mid-forties—had come together, and they remained a unit. Two younger couples had introduced themselves to each other on the plane and found common interests. Mrs. Pryce guessed they would go dining and sightseeing together. That left the Bennings, who had from the first clung to each other, bewildered and frightened, and Mrs. Pryce had thus been prompted to look out for them and reassure them, after which they had clung to *her*, two limpets out of their depth. There was one man by himself, a sober, decent-looking fellow named Prescott, who Mrs. Pryce guessed might be a recent widower. He had a reflective, inward look about him that she read as bereavement. That left three odd ones, all in their early twenties, who had come together, two men and a girl. They carried no luggage except canvas shoulder bags and they had been assigned one room. Mrs. Pryce speculated with pinched nostrils what *that*

arrangement might be.

She dined that night in the hotel dining room with the Bennings. Most of the tour people had gone scattering about, rushing off to stare at other tourists on the Via Veneto, to seek out a trattoria, to reassure themselves that they really were in Rome. Mrs. Pryce explained her views on this to the Bennings.

"I always feel the first night should be for light dining and early retiring. It fits one up for the rest of the tour," she explained, and the Bennings were quick to agree.

"Perhaps you could suggest something from the menu," Mrs. Benning said worriedly as she saw the waiter approaching, and Mrs. Pryce graciously agreed to do so after giving the menu careful study.

"*Vorrei de sogliola*," she told the waiter, speaking slowly and distinctly. "*E insalata*—"

"Sole for all three?" he said briskly, writing it down. "What salad dressing?"

Mrs. Pryce, a little hurt, nevertheless went on to order the house wine and *aqua minerale*. "So convenient that English is spoken quite universally," she said. But the Bennings were open-mouthed with admiration nonetheless. Across the dining room at a table against the wall Mrs. Pryce saw Mr. Prescott,

the lone man, eating by himself. She had tried to approach him as they entered and to invite him to dine with them, but he had only bobbed his head and pushed on to his solitary table. Pity, she thought, for she could see that he had ordered a quite unsuitable meal that might give him trouble later. She was quite sure she spotted both clams and sausage, and what looked to her like stuffed artichokes. Mrs. Pryce shuddered and shook her head.

"The guide will be taking us out tomorrow morning, won't she?" Mr. Benning inquired, and took out his tour schedule to examine it.

"Oh yes. I believe the bus tour of Rome is in the morning, and then in the afternoon isn't it the Vatican Museum?"

Mr. Benning's finger ran down the paper. "Yes, that seems to be it. Do we get to see the pope?"

Mrs. Pryce's eyes closed briefly and she managed a tolerant smile. "Not in the museum," she said. "On Sunday, I believe there will be a trip to St. Peter's Square, when he will no doubt appear on his balcony."

"Oh—" Mrs. Benning's breath was a trembling sigh and Mrs. Pryce could see the television shots of this scene flashing through her memory. She suggested, "Perhaps after we've ea-

ten we might take just a small stroll on the Via Veneto before turning in. Would you like that?"

"Oh, how exciting—yes, let's—" The rest of Mrs. Benning's effusion was lost on Harriet Pryce as she noticed a threesome just entering the dining room. The two Englishwomen from the room adjoining hers, and with them a tall good-looking man of forty or so—a younger Burt Lancaster type, Mrs. Pryce decided, rather on the rugged side. But of course an archaeologist—all that digging and outdoor work—for it had to be Dr. Brand, if for no other reason than the shining look of Violet's eyes behind their large spectacles when she looked at him. Yes, Grace had probably figured it right, even though she *had* been quite spiteful about it. Violet was in love with him: any fool could see it.

They took a table nearby, where Mrs. Pryce could observe them only obliquely, but there was little to observe anyway, for they ordered quietly and chatted inaudibly as they ate. Only when the Bennings and Mrs. Pryce were about to get up and leave was there a small flurry from that table. Mrs. Pryce saw that Grace had stood up, her dark eyes passionate with anger, her hand making

a quick gesture that upset her half-full wine glass. She said something sharp and angry which Mrs. Pryce could not quite make out and then turned and left the dining room, almost running. The other two had risen as well and Mrs. Pryce saw Violet put a restraining hand on Dr. Brand's sleeve and heard her say, "Wait, Nigel, I'll go after her . . . I'm sure she'd never . . . she didn't mean . . ."

Violet hurried after her friend, and Mrs. Pryce turned abruptly to the Bennings. "Do excuse me for just a second, won't you? I've forgotten my sweater, and the evening air may be cool. Wait for me in the lobby."

She did not bother with the elevator, but hurried up the marble stairs to the second floor, fumbling for her key as she went. She could hear angry voices the moment she was in her room, and she made her way in the dark to the bathroom and crept inside. However, she found the conversation disappointingly less audible than it had been earlier. The speakers were at the far end of the bedroom, away from the bath, she guessed. Grace, by the look of her as she left the dining room, might have flung herself on the bed. Mrs. Pryce could hear no more than snatches and phrases. "Absolute madness,

Grace . . . do yourself no good at all . . . can't possibly get away with . . ."

There were sounds of sobbing, then silence. Mrs. Pryce returned to her own room, closing the door behind her. She heard someone enter the bathroom and use it, heard water running as a faucet was turned on. Then presently there was the sound of a door opening and closing. Mrs. Pryce hurried to her own door and looked out into the corridor, in time to see Violet disappearing at the end of it. Mrs. Pryce snatched her sweater from the bed and hurried back down to the lobby, once again using the wide marble staircase, which she thought infinitely more trustworthy than the quivering elevator.

In the lobby she saw the Bennings waiting by the front door and watching anxiously for her. She gave a reassuring wave, then looked around for Violet. The young woman stood near a large ficus tree on one side of the lobby. She, too, was looking around for someone—Dr. Brand, of course. Mrs. Pryce fancied a look of distress in her face. He appeared presently from the opposite side of the lobby, the side where the phone booths, rest-rooms, and elevators were situated. He and Violet spoke in low tones for a moment, then went out through the front door,

their arms about each other's waists, their heads close together. Mrs. Pryce joined the Bennings, who were obviously so titillated by their surroundings that they had actually missed the whole thing. Just as well, Mrs. Pryce told herself. "Now then," she said expansively, "shall we start?" But television news clips were flashing in her own head now, and headlines from the *Times*. PROMINENT SCHOLAR CHARGED IN FRAUD . . . NOBEL COMMITTEE SAYS IT WILL ENTER PROBE . . . AMERICAN TOURIST'S TESTIMONY SOUGHT . . .

They walked down one side of the street and up the other, stopping at an open air cafe to have a cool drink and rest for a few moments, watching other tourists doing the same thing, then returned to the hotel.

"Well, I think I'm quite ready to turn in now," Mrs. Pryce announced as they entered the lobby, and the limpets were quick to agree. "Do be sure to wear comfortable shoes tomorrow morning," she counseled, and then, looking across the lobby, stopped short.

At the main desk where several guests were standing, some selecting newspapers, some receiving room keys, Mrs. Pryce saw the solitary traveler, Mr. Prescott, half-turned toward the door and obviously ill. He had

sagged at the knees suddenly, and was supporting himself on the desk. Two men, a porter and a guest, at once seized him by the elbows to assist him, and Mrs. Pryce, quick in an emergency, started across the lobby herself. Sausage, she was thinking angrily. Really. Inexperienced travelers are their own worst enemies. But by the time she reached him he was shrugging off the hands that held him. "No, no. I'm all right," she heard. Nevertheless, she approached him. "How do you do, Mr. Prescott. I'm Harriet Pryce—from your tour group? If I can be of any help—"

He looked so self-conscious, so vastly uncomfortable, that she thought he was ashamed of having given way—men are overly sensitive in these circumstances, she reminded herself. She said tactfully, "If I might suggest—the simpler the food one eats on these tours, the better. It's a great temptation, of course, to try the more exotic things, but one is infinitely safer with the ordinary. But I'm sure you'll be better by morning."

He agreed, mumbling his thanks, and hurried off to the elevator. Mrs. Pryce and the Bennings took the stairs.

There was a moment, as she turned the key in the lock to enter her room, that Mrs. Pryce

experienced a brief, heightened awareness of something—not wrong, perhaps, but slightly out of alignment, not jibing with the normal. She could not define it more accurately to herself. Yet as she entered the dark room and reached for the lamp whose location she had noted earlier—just to the left of the door, near the bed—she felt some unaccountable reason for haste, as if she must reach the small dangling chain quickly lest another colder hand reach it ahead of hers.

Then, at once, the inadequate bulb came on, dimly lighting the room, and furniture, drapes, tired rug all settled back to their proper aspect, and all was as she had left it. Mrs. Pryce let her breath out in a little relieved puff and dropped her purse and sweater on the bed. Tiptoeing, she went to the bathroom door and pushed it open. Darkness and silence, except for a persistent taxi horn in the street outside, and a sudden strident laugh from the cafe tables across the street—but distant, muted through the closed windows. I must open them, Mrs. Pryce thought. The place is quite stuffy. She reached for the bathroom's wall switch.

She was back at the bedside table in seconds, seizing the telephone, but it was seconds more before she could adjust

her breathing, summon up a voice that would be audible. And at last she raised the instrument and said as clearly as she could, "This is Harriet Pryce. Signora Pryce, Room 22—*ventidue*. There is a dead woman in the bathroom here. Her name is Grace something, I believe."

The next twenty-four hours were for Mrs. Pryce an unreality so bewildering that she seemed to be moving through an alien landscape, wading through ground mists and swamp water that clutched and sucked at her with every step. She forgot where she was, lost track of time, and felt, most of all, a vast smothering sense of make-believe swaddling her. She was no longer Harriet Pryce of Mamaroneck, New York. She was a performer in some absurd Italian opera—*The Daughter of the Regiment*, perhaps—surrounded by the fancy-dress uniforms of the *carabinieri*, bombarded by voices. And all those vowels! So ill-suited to the grim mechanics of the law, it seemed to her. The very language was all wrong for law enforcement. Still, she had to admit that the steps they were going through—the photographing, the taking of fingerprints, the questioning—all

seemed to be according to standard practices everywhere, as much as she knew of them from films and television. And one man, a plainclothes inspector, or the Roman equivalent, named Marillo, was quite calm and civil and was able to question her in English, which was a relief. Talking through an interpreter made Mrs. Pryce feel that perhaps her answers were not being accurately passed along.

Not that there was much to tell, although she was obliged to tell it over and over. She had dined with two other tour members, she had fetched a sweater from her room, she had gone walking on the Via Veneto with her friends, she had returned to her room, she had found the body.

Yes, he had the picture, Marillo said, not unkindly. And at what hour had she fetched her sweater?

"I really don't think I noticed the time."

Marillo turned to the police doctor, a tall, stooping man, and asked something. Mrs. Pryce saw the doctor's hands turn up and out, heard the low answer, "*Nove—nove e quindici*." Nine or nine fifteen. She understood that—the time of death, no doubt.

"You wear a wristwatch, signora," Marillo suggested.

"Yes, but really, I never even thought to look at it."

He studied her, nodded, changed the subject.

"The dead woman's friend, Miss Violet Shallcross. She left the hotel dining room ahead of you. The headwaiter has mentioned this."

"I did see her leave, yes." Mrs. Pryce had already decided that she would not mention the argument in the dining room unless someone else brought it up. In a crowded, noisy room it had not been noticeable, unless one was paying close attention, which of course she had been. Others might have missed it. It was not up to her to blow it out of proportion. It would look bad for Violet Shallcross, and surely, Mrs. Pryce told herself, Violet could not be the guilty one.

"And you followed her upstairs."

"No, indeed. I did not follow her. I simply went upstairs. To fetch a sweater."

"Ah, forgive me, Mrs. Pryce. My English is so inadequate. I did not mean to imply—let us say then—that you left the dining room after Miss Shallcross did. You went to fetch your sweater."

"Yes."

"Was she in the adjoining room with Miss Harwood when you were in your room finding your sweater?"

"I believe she was."

"You heard their voices?"

"I heard—voices."

"But not what was said?"

"Just snatches—very indistinct. I could not repeat a thing, no."

"Did you think they were arguing?"

"Not arguing, exactly—"

"What, exactly?"

"Just talking—really, you should discuss it with Miss Shallcross."

"I shall do so, of course, when she returns to the hotel. We have not been able to locate her. Now. You followed Miss Shallcross—excuse me, you returned to the lobby after Miss Shallcross did."

"Yes."

"What did she do there?"

"She joined Dr. Brand—no, he joined her, actually. He was not in the lobby when she got there, but he arrived shortly."

"How shortly?"

"Oh, two or three minutes. Almost right away."

"Where did he come from?"

"From across the lobby where the elevators are," Mrs. Pryce answered. After all, she thought, she had no desire to protect him.

The detective paused for a moment, then asked, "You have met Dr. Brand?"

"No."

"How did you know, then,

that it was he?"

Mrs. Pryce temporized. "I knew about the convention here. And he's quite well known—in his field. I merely assumed."

Dark eyes studied her briefly. Then he backtracked. "How long did you stay in your room before leaving with your sweater? A guess."

"Perhaps three minutes. And I should like to say, inspector—Signor Marillo—that I feel absolutely certain it could not have been Violet Shallcross who did it. There couldn't possibly have been time."

He studied her again, liquid brown eyes deepset and tired-looking. "You know how Miss Harwood was killed?"

"I heard the officer say—a knife." *Coltello*, he had said.

"A very sharp, slender knife, almost a stiletto. How long do you think it would take to kill someone with such a weapon, Signora Pryce?"

When Mrs. Pryce hesitated, her hand at her throat, he made a lightning-quick thrust in air. "Ten seconds—no more."

And Violet Shallcross had a strong, sturdy look despite her slenderness, Mrs. Pryce thought. Archaeologists spent a great deal of their time outdoors, did they not? With picks and mallets and such things—Mrs. Pryce shuddered, and looked around the room they had

cleared for her across the hall. She had no idea who had been put out nor did she care. The hotel had had her suitcase moved and *carabinieri* were milling about in the room that had formerly been hers.

"You have been most helpful, Mrs. Pryce," Marillo said, and just then there was a knock at the door. An officer stuck his head in and said something to Marillo, who answered, "*Bene.*"

He turned back to her and said, "I will leave you now, signora. Thank you for your help. It seems Miss Shallcross has returned."

Mrs. Pryce remained where she was, seated in an uncomfortable chair with a harsh overhead light above her. She was no longer curious, no longer excited. She felt let down, heavily depressed. Suddenly Grace Harwood was becoming a real person to her, a person who might be forgiven for her bristling anger and rudeness, for who could say? She might have had her reasons.

She heard a long high scream from out in the hall. It propelled her out of her chair and to the door, which she opened enough to hear Violet crying out wildly, "It can't be! I don't believe it! It has to be a mistake!"

Mrs. Pryce closed the door and went to the bed, lying down on top of the spread with her

knees drawn up, not even turning off the ceiling light.

Tomorrow, she thought, she would telephone Bernard.

She did not put the call through until midafternoon. Astonishingly, she slept until noon, after which the management sent up a lavish breakfast, and by the time she had bathed and dressed and started dealing with the hotel switchboard, the day was well along. She felt a need to discuss the whole matter with Bernard. She could not have said why; perhaps it was no more than a need to restore a sense of stability to her inner self—to reaffirm that she was who she was—to rid herself of this strange theatricality she felt herself wearing like a costume.

It would be early morning there; she decided to try the house first. No answer. Then he had already left for the office. She dealt with the operator again, giving her the office number. A woman's voice answered. Dr. Pryce was not there, not expected. He had gone out of town.

"Out of town? To the convention? But that doesn't start until Monday!"

"I couldn't say where's he's gone."

Mrs. Pryce identified herself

and asked, "Who is this? Is it Karen?" Karen would be able to give her the facts and she would be reassuring to talk to. A remarkably sensible girl. When Bernard had hired her as a technician and assistant six months ago, Mrs. Pryce had sworn she'd be absolutely useless. Too young, too delicate, too lovely, with her pale hair and blue eyes and slender hands that looked incapable of work. But her efficiency had surprised both of them. Irreplaceable, Bernard said of her now.

"Karen's not here either. It's Mrs. Kemp, the bookkeeper. I'm just doing some catching up, Mrs. Pryce. Are you really calling from Rome?"

"Thank you," Mrs. Pryce said hastily, and hung up.

Late in the day the Bennings knocked at her door timidly to see how she was. "We didn't want to disturb you earlier, Mrs. Pryce. We heard all about it—we were so shocked. And what you must have gone through! I simply can't believe we slept through it all!"

Mrs. Pryce, who could believe it, thanked them for their concern and asked about the tour.

"Everything cancelled for today, of course. The hotel is simply upside down. Policemen all over the lobby and in the corridors, all over the place. But

Miss Florio, our guide, says we'll be able to pick up our activities tomorrow. A bus tour of the city in the morning, and then the Tivoli gardens in the afternoon. Perhaps you'll feel like joining us."

"Yes. Well, perhaps."

"The police say now that it was a sneak thief, you know."

"They do?" Mrs. Pryce was at once alert.

"Yes. I daresay it's something they've seen before—"

"We reconstruct it somewhat this way," Marillo said, sitting opposite her. "The thief used the back service stairs. No doubt he was on his way up when Miss Shallcross left her room and when you yourself went out moments later with your sweater. Both of you ladies took the front stairs. He thought the rooms were empty. He entered one of them—yours or your neighbors'—"

"Mine was locked," Mrs. Pryce said quickly.

"Ah. Well, a locked door poses no problem for this type of thief. It's a common worry to hotels—all too common. Only it is unusual—" Marillo broke off.

"What is?"

"For such a person to commit a crime more serious than robbery. Murder is most rare in these circumstances. Yet we feel it's the only possible an-

swer. We found that money was missing, and there are other indications as well, so—" Marillo raised expressive eyebrows and shrugged.

Mrs. Pryce did not go on the bus tour of the city the next morning, but she appeared in the lobby early in the afternoon, in time for the trip to the Tivoli gardens, and was gratified to note that the other tour members regarded her with some awe. The Bennings hovered over her solicitously, looking after her now. Certainly a new spirit of enterprise and courage there, Mrs. Pryce noted. An ill wind that had blown some grains of courage in their direction. Briefly she wondered whether any of the archaeologists remained in the hotel: there was no sign of them.

Even the reserved Mr. Prescott spoke to her as the tour group assembled around Miss Florio preparatory to boarding the bus. "Back with us again, Mrs. Pryce?" he said with a diffident smile.

Mrs. Pryce was touched at his remembering her name. But then, of course, she must have been discussed extensively after the part she had played in the investigation. She answered, "Mr. and Mrs. Benning have coaxed me out. And it may do

us good." Generously she included them all in the crisis even though her importance had been so much greater than theirs. "A change of scene."

He nodded, and she, remembering, added hastily, "I do hope you're feeling fit again, Mr. Prescott. That little spell you had the other night—"

"Nothing at all," he said. "I took your advice about the food."

"I'm so glad."

The bus pulled up in front of the hotel and they filed on, young Miss Florio reminding them about sweaters. "You'll need them, even on such a warm day—the gardens are very cool." Mrs. Pryce saw the Benings seat themselves with quite independent aplomb in the front of the bus and decided she had done a good job of stiffening their spines. Mr. Prescott went to the rear and sat by himself. Even though he seemed disposed to be pleasant now, she was relieved that he had not sat with her. Now she could have a seat to herself. Her head was aching, and she needed solitude to consider the moral problem confronting her. The police seemed quite convinced that a hotel sneak thief was responsible for the murder. Marillo had said money was missing. They were spreading a dragnet over the city, alerting other hotels, he had told her. Was it

right, then, that she not report the rest of what she knew? The argument she had overheard in the dining room? Of course, others might have heard it, too—but she alone, with her greater knowledge, was able to attach significance to it.

The bus began climbing. Long sweeps of twisted gray olive trees covered the slopes. Mrs. Pryce turned blind eyes to them. She could still hear Violet's agitated voice. "Really, Nigel . . . I'm sure she'd never . . . she didn't mean . . ." Mrs. Pryce weighed the words. She'd never what? Didn't mean—what? A threat was certainly implied. Had Grace threatened to make public what she considered to be Nigel Brand's plagiarism? To destroy his reputation? And how far might a man thus threatened go to protect his professional standing? How far might a woman like Violet Shallcross go, for that matter, to protect a man she was in love with?

Mrs. Pryce felt the throbbing in her head grow until it was a steady, painful pounding. No, it could not have been Violet. There was something too fine, too gentle about her. Mrs. Pryce was quite unable to fit her into the role of murderer. And besides, there had been an absolutely genuine horror in her reaction when the police told

her what had happened. Even Dr. Brand—she was finding it almost as difficult to believe him capable of such a crime. A scholar, a historian-scientist, a man of libraries and museums and learned societies. Perhaps the police had been right and perhaps she should let it go. If only she could rid herself of this feeling that lingered, shivering, far back in her mind where the rarefied atmosphere was too thin for logic. This feeling of something wrong that kept nudging at her.

They drove into the parking area and the bus stopped. Still dull and unfocused, Mrs. Pryce took passing note of the souvenir shop with its trashy plates and vases and its garish postcards. She made a point of never patronizing such places. She watched as another bus drew up—this one full of school children. A nun herded them out and clapped for their attention. The breeze caught her short veil and sent it snapping behind her. The doors of their own bus opened, and Mrs. Pryce realized the young woman, Miss Florio, was speaking to them.

“—created in the sixteenth century by a prince of the church, Cardinal Ippolito d’Este, the villa is a superb Renaissance residence set in an extraordinary garden—”

Something moved, lightning-

like, in Mrs. Pryce’s aching head and began clawing for her attention. Violet’s voice again, this time overlaying the voice of the little tour guide:

“It can’t be! It has to be a mistake!”

“—which features five hundred fountains, reflecting pools and artistic plantings—”

A mistake.

Mistakes could happen, in a dim-lit room in the soft Roman evening. A woman of about my size, Grace Harwood was, Mrs. Pryce thought, and felt hysteria creeping up behind her on soft feet. Could it have been someone after me? Someone hired, perhaps, by a man longing to dispose of an unwanted wife? Karen’s pale hair and soft hands swam before her, an underwater dream. Then another picture supplanted it. Herself entering the hotel with the Bennings. And across the lobby a man at the desk sagging and stricken. But perhaps not with indigestion. Perhaps with shock, at the sight of her alive and well.

Because he had made a mistake.

Frantically she sought for a glimpse of the Bennings, but they had been far ahead of her, striding forward in their Hush Puppies, full of their new confidence. But I must not be alone! Mrs. Pryce thought with des-

perate fear. I must be with someone—I must stay with the group! The married couples, laughing and chattering, had gone. She had lingered too long. The three young shoulderbag people had also dashed forward and disappeared into the villa.

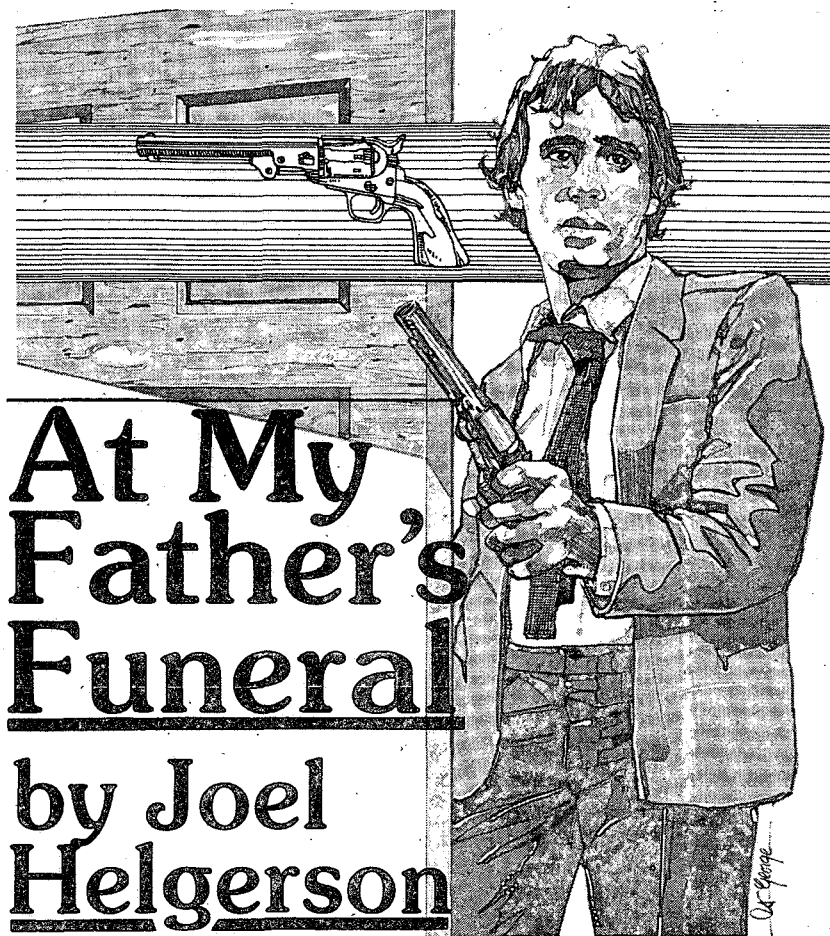
Miss Florio cast a last caveat over her shoulder.

"Do step carefully when you get into the gardens, all of you. Once we're out of the villa, many of the walkways will be wet and mossy, and there are some steep drops—"

Mrs. Pryce glanced over her shoulder and saw Mr. Prescott approaching, walking with a steady stride that covered the distance between them rapidly. He remembered my name, Mrs. Pryce thought. Perhaps he knew it always, right from the start of the trip.

He caught up with her. She noticed how cold and gray and narrow his eyes were.

"Shall we walk along together, Mrs. Pryce?" he said. "The others seem to have left us."



At My Father's Funeral

by Joel Helgerson

Stephanie MacPherson presented herself at the hair stylist's shop at one o'clock. Excited, lovely, and age twenty-three, she made no apologies for being an hour late. She had definite opinions about how she wanted her long auburn hair braided,

but then she owned a complete set of definite opinions on almost every topic. The hair stylist maintained a professional silence while Stephanie chirped on about how she wanted her hair arranged. She also chirped on about the paltry cost of a new sports car, and she almost sang about how she knew exactly what to do to make her life completely happy.

"David wants me to disobey my father's wishes and elope. I've told him we don't need to go to that extreme just because my father demands I marry someone with scads of money. I've told him that Father's worried about my security because his fiftieth birthday is coming up. It's sweet of Father to fret, but I certainly intend to take care of myself all the time.

"So I told David maybe we should simply cohabit. After all, this is 1983 and I am of legal age and I really don't know if I want anything permanent. Talking like that drives David crazy. He's eighteen and romantic. But I'm not sure that eloping is wise. My father is nearing his fiftieth birthday, you understand."

The fact that Phillip MacPherson would soon celebrate his fiftieth birthday would have meant little to anyone except a local historian. Few outside the family would have believed that every master of the MacPherson fortune since 1869 had been murdered on the eve of his fiftieth birthday. The MacPherson family trained its sons to protect their privacy, and Stephanie's father forbade any public knowledge of the situation.

Because the MacPhersons owned the local newspaper, they had been able to pretend the four murders were, instead, accidents, and no public voice contradicted them. The trouble with their cover-up was that the members of the family, from one generation to the next, also wanted to believe no one had been murdered. It made them feel secure. Convincing themselves that a string of murders couldn't stretch over one hundred and fourteen years became an easy task. Of course, some of the less disciplined family members believed it was a curse, but the leading men of the family scoffed at that possibility also.

Stephanie's father had told her, "Believe me, I'll lock myself away on that night. And once and for all we'll do away with this silly family superstition." When she warned him that he was doing exactly what every MacPherson had done since the first victim—the honorable Judge Stephen MacPherson—he changed the subject.

His naiveté provoked Stephanie to say, "Do you think a ghost is doing this to our family?" But he absolutely forbade her to com-

ment further.

Stéphanie told the hair stylist, "Maybe we should elope—just to jar Father awake. David's keen for it, of course, but I am an older woman and how would that look? I'm only five years older, you understand, but five years can be quite a difference when you're our age. He's just started college, you understand, while I'm thinking about going to law school. But he's so sweet, and I do want to make him happy."

In 1869 Judge Stephen MacPherson enjoyed all the blessings he thought a man could expect. His various enterprises included a St. Paul newspaper, a partnership in a logging company, and plans for a new railroad to transport settlers to the rich Red River Valley of Minnesota. He believed the West's time had arrived, and he sought to thrive with the expansion. He was confident of being appointed to the Supreme Court of Minnesota when the next opening occurred. He had taken a young and healthy wife, who had announced they could soon expect a new arrival in the family.

"And will the child be a laddie or a lass?"

"Surely a boy, sir."

"I've told you to dispense with calling me sir, have I not? It's fitting for you to call me Stephen."

"Yes, Stephen."

Even his young bride's resistance to her duties as wife had begun to vanish in the ten months since their marriage. Edith had slowly forgotten her infatuations and had gradually seen the sense her father displayed in preventing her marriage to a youth as penniless as Andrew Shattuck. It showed her breeding that she could control her heart and recognize the wisdom of marrying an established man who could provide. But that young rascal Shattuck! Nothing good would come of his spending his wages on renting a carriage so that he could ride past their house each Sunday. Such an obsession indicated the coarsest kind of manners, the type of behavior that should be vanishing from the streets of St. Paul now that civilized people were arriving. That type of behavior belonged farther west, where orchestras and subscription libraries were not yet available.

The arrest of Andrew Shattuck for smuggling whisky to the Sioux Indians of the Dakotas brought Judge Stephen MacPherson a long awaited opportunity. Ministers of the cloth and Governor

Sibley appeared in the spectators' gallery during a trial that lasted two days, an unheard of length for such a trial. Young Andrew Shattuck was at his best during the proceedings. Dressed as a dandy, he acted as his own attorney and drew out the testimony of every party involved.

Five times Judge MacPherson fined him for contempt of court, and five times Andrew MacPherson crowed like a rooster after the fine. The rougher elements of the gallery thought his act precious, and they bet heavily that young Andrew Shattuck would hoodwink the stern judge.

On the second day, at the climax of the trial, when the prosecutor was to call the witness who would clinch his case, the state attorney had to admit to the court that Running Bear would be unable to testify.

They did, however, have an affidavit with his mark. Andrew Shattuck sprang up.

"Your Honor, am I not to be faced by my accuser?"

"If the state attorney has an affidavit," Judge MacPherson said with admirable control, "then I see no need for the witness to be present."

"Surely, sir, you realize that the entire case of the state rests on the words of this Indian. No one else claims to have personally seen me deliver this hideous evil to my red brothers. At least we are entitled to hear why Running Bear cannot speak for himself."

Reluctantly, Judge MacPherson ruled that the state attorney explain the witness's absence.

"He's taken ill, your Honor. And cannot be present."

It took Judge MacPherson five minutes to quiet the courtroom.

The jury deliberated another ten minutes and returned with a verdict of not guilty, which caused Andrew Shattuck to cock-a-doodle-doo loudly again and to strut in front of the judge's bench with his hands tucked into his armpits. When Judge MacPherson slammed his gavel down and fined Shattuck the enormous amount of one hundred dollars, Shattuck said for all to hear:

"Your wife, sir, is carrying my child."

Andrew Shattuck may have been younger than the judge, but he was also smaller. The judge slid around his table and grasped the defendant in a grunting bear hug; Shattuck flailed at Judge MacPherson's ponderous arms and shoulders. It took both court deputies to separate the men.

When at last the judge returned to his chair, he rapped his gavel and sentenced Shattuck to three months in prison for striking an officer of the court. The judge saw no hypocrisy in the act.

Andrew Shattuck spent his three months in jail quite gracefully, almost as if he'd planned it. He got on famously with the guards, particularly the night guard, who suffered with rheumatism and needed a cup of red-eye to warm his joints. While in prison, Shattuck wrote a passionate daily letter to his beloved Edith, imploring her to leave her husband and go west with him. He advertised himself as a man with a promising future as a merchant.

She answered none of these letters until he'd been imprisoned a month. Then she sent a curt note asking him not to humiliate her with further foolishness. As the wife of an established man of the community, she could not be expected to have time to indulge in childhood fantasies. She suggested he mature and forget what she could no longer remember.

Three nights after Shattuck received the written dismissal, Judge MacPherson read late in his study. He studied philosophy that night, for he believed it his duty to understand what the great minds had thought. It was a windy November night; the house had many unfamiliar sounds; and he failed to notice the footsteps of Andrew Shattuck until it was far too late. He heard his name whispered and turned to see Shattuck standing at his side and holding a percussion pistol. The judge had time to say, "You can't . . ." before Shattuck poked the pistol to the judge's ear and pulled the trigger. For a moment, no creaking sounds filled the house. Then the wind found its voice, and Andrew Shattuck found his. He crowed like a rooster and strutted once around the dead body.

No one heard and no one saw.

In the morning a groggy guard swore that Shattuck had been in his cell all through the night. The newspapers noted the fact that Judge Stephen MacPherson would have celebrated his fiftieth birthday in one day. That fact pleased the deranged Andrew Shattuck, who repeated to himself all through the day, "Would have been fifty."

Shattuck left the state of Minnesota after his jail term. He was then twenty and in command of modest resources, due to his earnings from bootlegging. Moving out of the liquor business, he went on to land speculation and became highly

successful, which is to say he sold thousands of nearly worthless acres to immigrants who couldn't speak English well enough to identify him as a scoundrel. He spoke and they believed. It was almost as simple as that.

The only complications involved the daughters of the immigrants. During those years, Andrew Shattuck prided himself on being an accomplished rake, and the Norwegian or German or Swedish farm girls willingly traded an evening of barnyard chores for his apparent sophistication. They especially laughed at the way he cock-a-doodle-dooed from the hay loft; they understood that much of what he said. If their fathers were sly, they occasionally received a worthless farm free instead of investing their life savings in it.

By the age of forty-five, Andrew Shattuck had acquired enough wealth to return to Minneapolis and St. Paul and marry the daughter of a leading citizen there, one who needed financial backing to save his mill from failure. Shattuck provided more than money, he provided inspired leadership, which resulted in the mill's prospering.

In time he became involved in banking and politics and railroad transportation. The railroads, he knew, would not only open the Upper Midwest, they would enrich Minneapolis and St. Paul. He curbed his outrageous outings to more reserved brothels, and appeared a devoted husband and father. Actually, he became rather pompous, rather like the deceased Judge MacPherson. Andrew Shattuck's one memento from his vigorous past was a percussion pistol he kept mounted in his study. If a mood of instruction fell upon him, he summoned his son William to the study, and for an evening he would tell tales about that small pistol that kept the boy awake in his bed until dawn.

During this time, Edith MacPherson had raised her son Louis and governed wisely the fledgling fortune her husband had hatched. She, too, foresaw that the future involved politics and railroads; and her parlor became one of the centers for Republican conferences in the state. She favored enlightened governing of the railroad rates, and that was where she and Andrew Shattuck renewed their hatred.

They could not entirely avoid each other, for Andrew had also become a pillar of the Republican party. His views most often opposed Edith's. It was at a political fund-raiser that they first actually crossed paths.

"The boy looks like me," Andrew said of the twenty-five-year-old Louis, who towered at Edith's side.

"Are you blind, sir?"

"He has my eyes, there's no denying it."

Edith moved away, saying, "This is most distasteful."

Andrew held her by the arm. "I killed your humbug judge."

"Can I help you, Mother?" Louis interrupted.

"This man's imbibed too much, that's all."

With that snub, Andrew Shattuck felt an unrest and chaos arise inside himself that he thought he had spread across the bleak plains of the Dakotas. Memories from twenty-five years past overpowered him. He said to Edith MacPherson, "You were a whore when I first knew you, and you've not changed during these twenty-five years." He forced an embrace and a kiss upon her.

The athletic son Louis came to his mother's aid with an ungentlemanly punch. The lad had unleashed his strength, for it took a splash of water to rouse Shattuck, who sputtered for a moment before swearing a vengeance on the both of them.

That evening marked the end of Andrew Shattuck's open involvement in politics, although he remained influential. His empire grew and prospered. Those times when his name appeared in the newspaper it was as the associate of someone going on trial.

The MacPherson fortune also multiplied under the stewardship of Louis. The two families didn't represent the only fortunes in the state, but they were certainly opposing powers.

Over the years, Louis referred to the threat of Andrew Shattuck jokingly and gradually not at all because it obviously pained his mother. Louis married young, and soon had a promising heir. By forty-five he was a proud grandfather, and Edith, at sixty-five, a matriarch. Another handful of years passed, and Andrew Shattuck was not mentioned at all.

On a warm spring night in 1920, Louis was wakened by the shattering of glass in their cottage at White Bear Lake. He pulled on his robe to investigate. The moon gave his yard an ivory light; a whippoorwill practiced its choruses. Everything seemed peaceful. He heard another crash and saw an old man hobble ahead of him around the corner of the cottage. Louis hurried forward, half wondering if the old man needed assistance, half angry over this foolishness.

He turned the corner and came face to face with a relic of a man holding a tiny pistol.

"Do you remember me?" the man asked.

Louis didn't respond but reached out to grab the pistol. That was when the shot roused Louis's wife Alma. The shot pierced Louis's heart and the old man said:

"Tomorrow you would have been fifty. Happy birthday."

In the fall of 1941, James MacPherson entertained his board of directors at his north woods cottage. The weekend celebration took place because of their successful snaring of a government contract to build armaments for the British; also, James would celebrate his fiftieth birthday on that Sunday.

Since age twenty-nine and his father's death, James had managed the MacPherson companies so well that now he needed the assistance of a board of directors to govern his diverse holdings. His grandmother Edith had advised him during the unfamiliar first years, but James soon held the respect of his business associates for his decisions.

Edith never informed him of the probable murderer of his father and grandfather; she had no proof of her husband's murderer but the statement of a drunken Andrew Shattuck. And how could she believe that a seventy-year-old Andrew Shattuck could manage to murder her son Louis? The connection of the two deaths remained her secret until her death at seventy-nine.

The proposed activity of that 1941 weekend party was deer hunting. Before dawn the gentlemen positioned themselves at their stands; the night fogs still curled about the birches and pines. James believed in setting an example, so he did not leave his position that Saturday until dusk and the return of the lake mists. In the twilight, he saw the red hunting jacket of an associate wending his way toward him. That was the first and last mistake James MacPherson ever made. Using lanterns, they found him with a pistol shot to his head.

The string of businesses forced upon Francis MacPherson in 1941 was disorderly, to his disciplined way of thinking. He'd spent his youth in Eastern cities learning the art of the concert pianist. By the age of twenty-six, he had sniffed some minor successes but did not appear headed to the top of his profession. He returned to Minnesota lacking business knowledge but perhaps subconsciously relieved that he did not have to pursue his career as a concert pianist all the way to its dead end. His life as

a pianist made him a believer in using professional managers. Slowly, the MacPherson enterprises changed into a corporation.

Francis MacPherson preferred the image of patron to the arts over that of business tycoon. When his son Phillip showed a return to the business acumen of his grandfather, Francis exited gracefully from the corporate picture. The father and son presented a contrast of personalities that puzzled all who knew them: the father, moody and often depressed; the son, confident and outgoing.

When Francis MacPherson was found slain on the floor of his music room on the eve of his fiftieth birthday, his son believed it a suicide. "The result of an unhealthy preoccupation with the hunting accident that killed my grandfather." The year was 1965, and the only question the police had was, "Did your father collect antique pistols?" The name of Andrew Shattuck meant absolutely nothing to Phillip MacPherson, who refused to believe the family stories of how the firstborn males were murdered on the eve of their fiftieth birthday.

A college freshman in the spring of 1983 found it no easier to stumble about in love than a young gentleman of the 1860's. The rules had shifted, but the emotions stayed as raw. The passionate player still sizzled on the skewer. David Shattuck was a passionate player.

As he wheeled his motorcycle into the parking lot, he tried one last time to convince himself that he was going to see his fiancée. That was how Stephanie had to answer his proposal. He could feel everything inside him shatter if he considered the possibility of her refusing to marry him. He had known that trembling feeling before when his grandfather had to restrict his activities because of his nerves. But he knew health now, and he sensed that this was to be his day, that Stephanie would say yes and everything would be perfect. His grandfather William couldn't slight him for marrying the beautiful heiress of the MacPherson wealth. For his own romantic notions of truth, he'd not told Stephanie anything about his being the grandson of the rich William Shattuck. He'd told her that his last name was Windsor and that he'd been raised in an orphanage. Winning her this way made their love perfect, and perfection was what he expected in all matters of the heart.

His first thought upon seeing Stephanie was that she'd braided her hair in exactly the fashion he approved of. He took her up in his arms and swung her around.

"David, you're just wild," she said.

"You've decided yes, haven't you?"

"I haven't decided anything."

"You shouldn't tease," David said. He set her down, saying, "We mustn't tease each other."

She attempted to thrill him with a kiss, but when he remained tight-lipped, she led him into her apartment and said, "My father's concerned. Don't pout, David. You and I both know you've a brilliant career ahead of you as a film producer, but you'll have to excuse my father if he doesn't recognize it."

"Did I say anything?"

"I saw that hopeless cross-eyed look."

"I'm not cross-eyed."

"You know what I mean."

"What will it take to change his mind?" David asked.

"Nothing will change him," she said with a sigh. "He's determined to keep me his little girl forever and forever. It's so ridiculous. It makes me feel like Alice trapped in Wonderland."

"I'll be worth money. He doesn't have to worry about money."

Stephanie said, "Sometimes I wish I were a test-tube baby."

David got down in front of her and said, "Just tell me that you want to; that's all I need to know."

"We could try living together, David. You could move in here, and Father would never know. He never comes over."

"He's probably got your apartment under surveillance."

"He'll never do that again," Stephanie said.

"What do you mean?"

"He tried it once, and I didn't speak to him for months."

David stood up and whispered, "Why did he keep your apartment under surveillance? Tell me." He strained to keep himself under control, but Stephanie only laughed at him, saying:

"David, you're predictable."

David forced a laugh and repeated, "Tell me that you want to, that's all I need to know."

That was when Stephanie became stern. "David, it's important for me to consider my father's wishes. If that sounds old-fashioned to you, then I'm not sure you're as wonderful as I thought."

"I'll talk to your father."

"I've already told him about you," Stephanie said. "It's not that he's against you. It's that he wants me to be happy, which is what I thought you wanted."

He broke a hall light on the way out. He revved his motorcycle so loudly that an alley cat stood transfixed in the middle of his path. Bearing down on it, he increased his speed until at the last moment he jerked his front wheel to the side and skidded on the pavement for ten yards. He broke a bone in his wrist.

The offices of Peter Whitney were unfamiliar to David Shattuck, but the pale, ancient face of Lawyer Whitney was completely familiar. Sometimes he dreamed about that somber face, and the dreams didn't happen in sunny pastures but usually in caverns. Peter Whitney had handled the Shattuck legal affairs since David's great-grandfather had hired him in 1921. Now Whitney was an old scow of a lawyer, thick with barnacles. His cheeks puffed with every breath. He'd taken on a handsome young partner named Mark Jenson, who looked able to outdo Peter Whitney in legal shenanigans.

Whitney wheezed into his handkerchief before saying: "Your grandfather told us you'd be coming."

"Is he having me watched?"

"Not at all. He's a capable reader of people though, even if he does need bifocals."

"Did he tell you why I'd be coming?"

Whitney coughed, sipped some water, and billowed his cheeks. "Some to-do about a young woman."

"I need to have the details of my inheritance made clear to me," David said. "My future father-in-law is concerned about his daughter's welfare."

"Your father once sat before me and made that request."

They stared at each other, one young and bitter, one old and impassive. David said, "The only thing I like about you is that you're the one person who doesn't hesitate to mention my father."

"Why should I? He committed suicide some eighteen years ago and if you . . . you haven't grown accustomed to that fact . . . by now, you never will."

It was a long speech for the old man, and he now said, "I've called Jenson in to explain the terms of your inheritance. He'll be your executor for as long as is necessary."

Jenson stepped forward, placing an antique box on the desk in front of David. His movements were overly theatrical, as if he enjoyed the juice of this little drama.

"Please open the box, Mr. Shattuck."

Inside the velvet-lined box David found a poorly crafted pistol, surely inelegant to anyone but an antique collector.

"I've asked for the details of my inheritance. When I will receive it. What its amount will be. I've urgent need."

"With your inheritance comes a responsibility," Jenson said. "A responsibility intimately tied to the weapon in that box." He stepped forward to admire the pistol. "You are fortunate, Mr. Shattuck, to have been born into a family with a sense of destiny. Not many people in these confusing decades can claim such a legacy. Your great-grandfather was a man who believed in loyalty. He believed in rewarding loyalty and punishing the disloyal; and he was a man who saw beyond the dimensions of his own fragile lifetime. He looked ahead to his sons and their sons, and he conceived of a test to ensure they were capable of directing the wealth he'd left them."

It took Jenson fifteen minutes to trace the history of David's ancestors and the executions they performed in order to pass their initiation. The young lawyer dwelled lovingly on certain details: the admirableness of a seventy-year-old man's ability to carry out his revenge; the inability of David's father to live himself after completing his execution.

"If you hadn't soon come to us," Jenson explained, "we would soon have come to you, for Phillip MacPherson is nearing age fifty and the terms of your inheritance are due."

"That's murder," David said.

Ancient Peter Whitney coughed and said, "Exactly what his father said."

"You can't prevent me from gaining what's entitled to me with a threat such as this."

"Exactly what his father said."

Jenson explained with enthusiasm. "That's the masterfulness of Andrew Shattuck's plan, for he envisioned the mechanism to make his will work in spite of legal entanglements and objections from offspring. He gave this law office enough voting shares to ensure the entire downfall of the Shattuck businesses if a descendant objected. And to a second reputable law firm in this area; he gave a packet of evidence that would condemn not only his heirs but this law firm. That evidence was to remain unopened until such a time as the head of the MacPherson family reached the age of fifty. The law firm is the very clan of puritans that manage the legal affairs of the MacPherson Corporation. They take exceedingly

good care of that packet because our legal firm pays them the sum of ten thousand dollars each year. If they did not receive payment from us, that too would entitle them to open the packet."

"You see, young David," Peter Whitney said, "you really have no choice. Take the pistol. It is the weapon you have the right to use. May God be with you."

David used a kayak to approach the MacPherson summer mansion soundlessly on White Bear Lake. At the side of the house he could see the Fiat that Stephanie drove. Knowing she was present in the mansion beckoned him on. For over a week he'd been hearing voices that mocked him for not taking the matter into his own hands. Finally, he could tolerate it no more, and on the eve of Phillip MacPherson's fiftieth birthday he decided to go have a talk with Stephanie's father. David would explain everything; it seemed the only way to peace. Inside his windbreaker he carried the percussion pistol that was his legacy. He wasn't sure whether he carried it as proof of his story or as protection in case Phillip MacPherson attacked him.

Once he had been a guest in this mansion, which was copied from the floor plans of an English manor. He knew the exact location of Phillip MacPherson's bedroom because to get to Stephanie's bedroom he'd had to creep by her father's.

Shuddering, he waited in the garden until the last light went out. Stephanie had once shown him a basement window she sneaked in and out of as a teenager, and he entered the mansion there, using a penlight for vision. He paused often to make sure that everything in the house remained still. He tried to be completely quiet inside his head, where he knew an unguarded moment would start up voices he couldn't defend himself against.

Phillip MacPherson slept soundly. There had been a small party, and the wine he'd consumed soon put him into a deep snore.

Phillip had left the light on in his private bathroom. By the illumination of that light, David could see a man murmuring to himself in his sleep and smiling slightly at what he was saying. The straight line of Phillip's nose and the thin line of his lips reminded David of midnight moments when he'd looked at the sleeping face of Stephanie. The resemblance was unmistakable. He couldn't bear the peaceful, childlike look that had settled on the man's face. Rather than disturb such a scene, he turned to leave.

During that unguarded moment, the voices came to him, and he

heard himself saying: "What will it take to change his mind?"

He heard Stephanie answer, "Nothing will change him. He's determined to keep me his little girl forever and forever."

He heard young Lawyer Jenson say, "You are fortunate, Mr. Shattuck, to have been born into a family with a sense of destiny."

At that moment Phillip MacPherson stirred in his sleep, frightening David into action. He pointed the pistol and shot. Phillip MacPherson would have been fifty in fifteen minutes.

Stephanie MacPherson stepped into the hallway after she heard the second shot. She hadn't expected that second shot. At the far end of the hallway, her weekend guest came out of the guest room. They hurried to her father's room where they found the two bodies sprawled on the bed.

"Is either still alive?" Stephanie asked.

Her weekend guest felt for pulses and replied, "No, he did that part right."

"I didn't expect him to kill himself here."

"It's simpler this way," her guest said.

Before the servant arrived, they removed the tape player they'd set under her father's bed. They embraced for a hasty moment and swore their love. "Quick, now," her guest said, "get this tape deck back to your room."

"I'll see you at my father's funeral?"

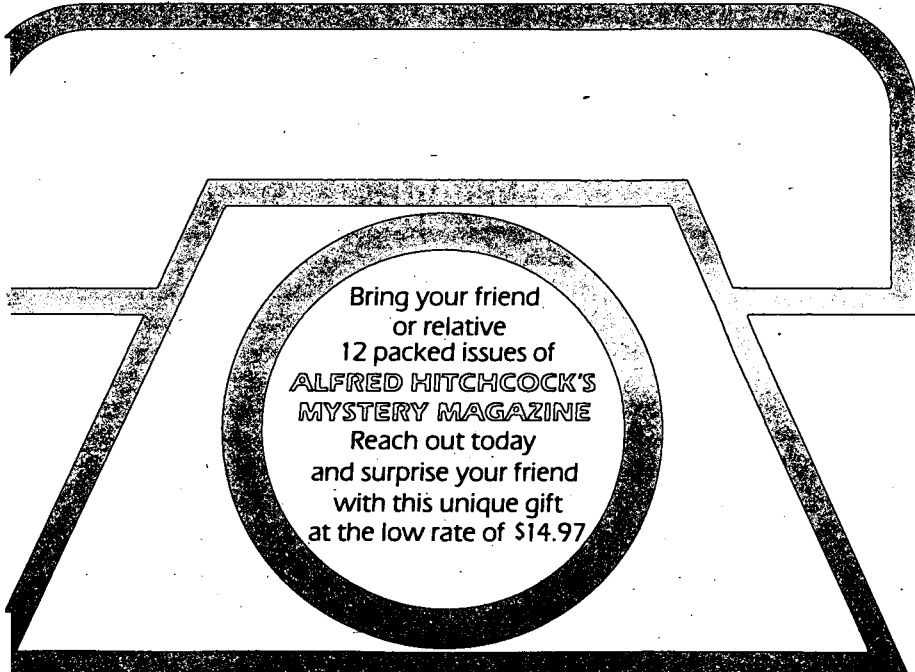
"Not before. We can't slip now."

The sleepy maid found only the bewildered Mark Jenson in the bedroom, Mark Jenson of the Whitney Law Firm. As he told the maid to call the police, he thought of the wealth that Stephanie now inherited and the wealth that his law firm would soon control (once David's grandfather died) and he thanked his busy Aunt Helen, who had established herself as his family's historian.

Aunt Helen Jenson had first ignited his curiosity about Andrew Shattuck by hinting that Mark's great-great-grandmother had been seduced by the great man in her father's hayloft. Without that initial push, and the subsequent digging, he might never have happened across the odd string of murders and traced them back to the man who was his real great-great-grandfather. Certainly, he would never have chosen the Whitney Law Firm solely because of its longstanding affiliation with the Shattuck fortune. There were many fortunes in need of a brilliant young lawyer.

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Greektown

by

Loren D. Estleman

The restaurant was damp and dim and showed every indication of having been hollowed out of a massive stump, with floorboards scoured as white as wood grubs and tall booths separated from the stools at the counter by an aisle just wide enough for skinny waitresses like you never see in Greektown. It was Greektown, and the only waitress in sight looked like a garage door in a uniform. She caught me checking out the booths and trundled my way, turning stools with her left hip as she came.

"You are Amos Walker?" She had a husky accent and large, dark, pretty eyes set in the rye dough of her face. I said I was, and she told me Mr. Xanthes was delayed and sat me down

in a booth halfway between the door and the narrow hallway leading to the restrooms in back. Somewhere a radio turned low was playing one of those frantic Mediterranean melodies that sound like hornets set loose in the string section.

The waitress was freshening my coffee when my host arrived, extending a small right hand and a smiling observation on downtown Detroit traffic. Constantine Xanthes was a wiry five feet and ninety pounds with deep laugh lines from his narrow eyes to his broad mouth and hair as black at fifty as mine was going gray at thirty-three. His light blue tailormade suit fit him like a sheen of water. He smiled a lot, but so does every other restaurateur,



and none of them means it either. When he found out I hadn't eaten he ordered egg lemon soup, bread, feta cheese, roast lamb, and a bottle of ouzo for us both. I passed on the ouzo.

"Greektown used to be more than just fine places to eat," he sighed, poking a fork at his lamb. "When my parents came it was a little Athens, with markets and pretty girls in red and white dresses at festival time and noise like I can't describe to you. It took in Macomb, Randolph, and Monroe Streets, not just one block of Monroe like now. Now those colorful old men you see drinking retsina on the stoops get up and go home to the suburbs at dark."

I washed down the last of the strong cheese with coffee. "I'm

a good P.I., Mr. Xanthes, but I'm not good enough to track down and bring back the old days. What else can I do to make your life easier?"

He refilled his glass with ouzo and I watched his Adam's apple bob twice as the syrupy liquid slid down his throat. Afterwards he was still smiling, but the vertical line that had appeared between his brows when he was talking about what had happened to his neighborhood had deepened.

"I have a half brother, Joseph," he began. "He's twenty-three years younger than I am; his mother was our father's second wife. She deserted him when he was six. When Father died, my wife and I took over the job of raising Joseph, but by then

I was working sixty hours a week at General Motors and he was seventeen and too much for Grace to handle with two children of our own. He ran away. We didn't hear from him until last summer, when he walked into the house unannounced, all smiles and hugs, at least for me. He and Grace never got along. He congratulated me on my success in the restaurant business and said he'd been living in Iowa for the past nine years, where he'd married and divorced twice. His first wife left him without so much as a note and had a lawyer send him papers six weeks later. The second filed suit on grounds of brutality. It seems that during quarrels he took to beating her with the cord from an iron. He was proud of that.

"He's been here fourteen months, and in that time he's held more jobs than I can count. Some he quit, some he was fired from, always for the same reason. He can't work with or for a woman. I kept him on here as a busboy until he threw a stool at one of my waitresses. She'd asked him to get a can of coffee from the storeroom and forgot to say please. I had to let him go."

He paused, and I lit a Winston to keep from having to say anything. It was all beginning to sound familiar. I wondered why.

When he saw I wasn't going to comment he drew a folded clipping from an inside breast pocket and spread it out on the table with the reluctant care of a father getting ready to punish his child. It was from that morning's *Free Press*, and it was headed PSYCHIATRIST PROFILES FIVE O'CLOCK STRANGLER.

That was the name the press had hung on the nut who had stalked and murdered four women on their way home from work on the city's northwest side on four separate evenings over the past two weeks. The women were found strangled to death in public places around quitting time, or reported missing by their families from that time and discovered later. Their ages ranged from twenty to forty-six, they had had no connection with each other in life, and they were all WASPs. One was a nurse, two were secretaries, the fourth had been something mysterious in city government. None was raped. The *Free Press* had dug up a shrink who claimed the killer was between twenty-five and forty, a member of an ethnic or racial minority group, and a hater of professional women, a man who had had experiences with such women unpleasant enough to unhinge him. It was the kind of article you usually find in the science section after someone's made off with the sports and the

comics, only today it had run on page one because there hadn't been any murders in a couple of days to keep the story alive. I'd read it at breakfast. I knew now what had nagged me about Xanthes' story.

"Your brother's the Five O'Clock Strangler?" I tipped half an inch of ash into the tin tray on the table.

"Half brother," he corrected. "If I was sure of that, I wouldn't have called you. Joseph could have killed that waitress, Mr. Walker. As it was he nearly broke her arm with that stool, and I had to pay for X-rays and give her a bonus to keep her from pressing charges. This article says the strangler hates working women. Joseph hates *all* women, but working women especially. His mother was a licensed practical nurse and she abandoned him. His first wife was a legal secretary and *she* left him. He told me he started beating his second wife when she started talking about getting a job. The police say that because the killer strangles women with just his hands he has to be big and strong. That description fits my half brother; he's built more like you than me, and he works out regularly."

"Does he have anything against white Anglo-Saxon Protestants?"

"I don't know. But his mother

was one and so was his first wife. The waitress he hurt was of Greek descent."

I burned some more tobacco. "Does he have an alibi for any of the times the women were killed?"

"I asked him, in a way that wouldn't make him think I suspected him. He said he was home alone." He shifted his weight on the bench. "I didn't want to press it, but I called him one of those nights and he didn't answer. But it wasn't until I read this article that I really started to worry. It could have been written about Joseph. That's when I decided to call you. You once dug up an eyewitness to an auto accident whose testimony saved a friend of mine a bundle. He talks about you often."

"I have a license to stand in front of," I said. "If your half brother is the strangler I'll have to send him over."

"I understand that. All I ask is that you call me before you call the police. It's this not knowing, you know? And don't let him know he's being investigated. There's no telling what he'll do if he finds out I suspect him."

We took care of finances—in cash; you'll look in vain for a checkbook in Greektown—and he slid over a wallet-sized photo of a darkly handsome man in his late twenties with glossy

black hair like his half brother's and big liquid eyes not at all like Xanthes' slits. "He goes by Joe Santine. You'll find him working part-time at Butsukitis' market on Brush." Joseph's home telephone number and an address on Gratiot were written on the back of the picture. That was a long way from the area where the bodies were found, but then the killer hardly ever lives in the neighborhood where he works. Not that that made any difference to the cops busy tossing every house and apartment on the northwest side.

He looked like his picture. After leaving the restaurant, I'd walked around the corner to a building with a fruit and vegetable stand out front and a faded canvas awning lettered BUTSUKITIS' FINE PRODUCE. While a beefy bald man in his sixties with fat quilting his chest under a white apron was dropping some onions into a paper sack for me, a tall young man came out the front door lugging a crate full of cabbages. He hoisted the crate onto a bare spot on the stand, swept large shiny eyes over the milling crowd of tomato-squeezers and melon-huggers, and went back inside swinging his broad shoulders.

As the grocer was ringing up

the sale, a blonde wearing a navy blue business suit asked for help loading two bags of apples and cherries into her car. "Santine!" he bellowed.

The young man returned. Told to help the lady, he hesitated, then slouched forward and snatched up the bags. He stashed them on the front seat of a green Olds parked half a block down the street and swung around and walked away while she was still rummaging in her handbag for a tip. His swagger going back into the store was pronounced. I paid for my onions and left.

Back at the office I called Iowa information and got two numbers. The first belonged to a private detective agency in Des Moines. I called them, fed them the dope I had on Santine and asked them to scrape up what they could. My next call was to the Des Moines *Express*, where a reporter held me up for fifty dollars for combing the morgue for stories about non-rape female assault and murder during the last two years Santine lived in the state. They both promised to wire the information to Barry Stackpole at the Detroit *News* and I hung up and dialed Barry's number and traded a case of scotch for his cooperation. The expenses on this one were going to eat up my fee. Finally I called John Alderdyce at police headquar-

ters. "Who's working the Five O'Clock Strangler case?" I asked him.

"Why?"

I used the dead air counting how many times he'd asked me that and dividing it by how many times I'd answered.

"DeLong," he said then. "I could just hang up because I'm busy, but you'd probably just call again."

"Probably. Is he in?"

"He's in that lot off Lahser where they found the last body. With Michael Kurof."

"The psychic?"

"No, the plumber. They're stopping there on their way to fix DeLong's toilet." He broke the connection.

The last body had been found lying in a patch of weeds in a wooded lot off Lahser just south of West Grand River by a band student taking a shortcut home from practice. I parked next to the curb behind a blue-and-white and mingled with a group of uniforms and obvious plainclothesmen watching Kurof walk around, with Inspector DeLong nipping along at his side like a spaniel trying to keep up with a Great Dane. DeLong was a razor-faced twenty-year cop with horns of pink scalp retreating along a mouse-colored widow's peak. Kurof, a Russian-born bear of

a man, bushy-haired and blue of chin even when it was still wet from shaving, bobbed his big head in time with DeLong's mile-a-minute patter for a few moments, then raised a palm, cutting him off. After that they wandered the lot in silence.

"What they looking for, rattlesnakes?" muttered a grizzled fatty in a baggy brown suit.

"Vibes," someone answered. "Emanations, the Russky calls 'em."

Lardbottom snorted. "We ran fortune-tellers in when I was in uniform."

I was nudged by a young black uniform, who winked gravely and stooped to lay a gold pencil he had taken from his shirt pocket on the ground, then backed away from it. Kurof's back was turned. Eventually he and DeLong made their way to the spot, where the psychic picked up the pencil, stroked it once between the first and second fingers of his right hand, and turned to the black cop with a broad smile, holding out the item. "You are having fun with me, officer," he announced in a deep burring voice. The uniform smiled stiffly back and accepted the pencil.

"Did you learn anything, Dr. Kurof?" DeLong wanted to know.

Kurof shook his great head slowly. "Nothing useful, I fear. Just a tangible hatred. The air

is ugly everywhere here, but it is ugliest where we are standing. It crawls."

"We're standing precisely where the body was found." The inspector pushed aside a clump of thistles with his foot to expose a fresh yellow stake driven into the earth. He turned toward one of the watching uniforms. "Give our guest a lift home. Thank you, doctor. We'll be in touch when something else comes up." They shook hands and the Russian moved off slowly with his escort.

"Hatred," the fat detective growled. "Like we needed a gypsy to tell us that."

DeLong told him to shut up and go back to headquarters. As the knot of investigators loosened, I approached the inspector and introduced myself.

"Walker," he considered. "Sure, I've seen you jawing with Alderdyce. Who hired you, the family of one of the victims?"

"Just running an errand." Sometimes it's best to let a cop keep his notions. "What about what this psychiatrist said about the strangler in this morning's *Freeze*? You agree with that?"

"Shrinks. Twenty years in school to tell us why some j.d. sapped an old lady and snatched her purse. I'll stick with guys like Kurof; at least he's not smug." He stuck a Tiparillo in his mouth and I lit it and a Winston for me. He sucked

smoke. "My theory is the killer's unemployed and he sees all these women running out and getting themselves fulfilled by taking his job and something snaps. It isn't just coincidence that the statistics on crime against women have risen with their number in the work force."

"Is he a minority?"

"I hope so." He grinned quickly and without mirth. "No, I know what you mean. Maybe. Minorities outnumber the majority in this town in case you haven't noticed. Could be the victims are all WASPs because there are more women working who are WASPs. I'll ask him when we arrest him."

"Think you will?"

He glared at me, then he shrugged. "This is the third mass-murder case I've investigated. The one fear is that it'll just stop. I'm still hoping to wrap it up before famous criminologists start coming in from all over to give us a hand. I never liked circuses even when I was a kid."

"What are you holding back from the press on this one?"

"You expect me to answer that? Give up the one thing that'll help us differentiate between the original and all the copycats?"

"Call John Alderdyce. He'll tell you I sit on things till they hatch."

"Oh, hell." He dropped his lit-

tle cigar half-smoked and crushed it out. "The guy clobbers his victims before he strangles them. One blow to the left cheek, probably with his right fist. Keeps 'em from struggling."

"Could he be a boxer?"

"Maybe. Someone used to using his dukes."

I thanked him for talking to me. He said, "I hope you are working for the family of a victim."

I got out of there without answering. Lying to a cop like DeLong can be like trying to smuggle a bicycle through customs.

It was coming up on two o'clock. If the killer was planning to strike that day,

I had three hours. At the first telephone booth I came to, I excavated my notebook and called Constantine Xanthes' home number in Royal Oak. His wife answered. She had a mellow voice and no accent.

"Yes, Connie told me he was going to hire you. He's not home, though. Try the restaurant."

I explained she was the one I wanted to speak with and asked if I could come over. After a brief pause she agreed and gave me directions. I told her to expect me in half an hour.

It was a white frame house that would have been in the

country when it was built, but now it was shouldered by two housing tracts with a third going up in the empty field across the street. The doorbell was answered by a tall woman on the far side of forty with black hair streaked blonde to cover the gray and a handsome oval face, the flesh shiny around the eyes and mouth from recent remodeling. She wore a dark knit dress that accentuated the slim lines of her torso and a long colored scarf to make you forget she was big enough to look down at the top of her husband's head without trying. We exchanged greetings and she let me in and hung up my hat and we walked into a dim living room furnished heavily in oak and dark leather. We sat down facing each other in a pair of horsehair-stuffed chairs.

"You're not Greek," I said.

"I hardly ever am." Her voice was just as mellow in person.

"Your husband was mourning the old Greektown at lunch and now I find out he lives in the suburbs with a woman who isn't Greek."

"Connie's ethnic standards are very high for other people."

She was smiling when she said it, but I didn't press the point. "He says you and Joseph have never been friendly. In what ways weren't you friendly when he was living here?"

"I don't suppose it's ever easy

bringing up someone else's son. His having been deserted didn't help. Lord save me if I suggested taking out the garbage."

"Was he sullen, abusive, what?"

"Sullen was his best mood. 'Abusive' hardly describes his reaction to the simplest request. The children were beginning to repeat his foul language. I was relieved when he ran away."

"Did you call the police?"

"Connie did. They never found him. By that time he was eighteen and technically an adult. He couldn't have been brought back without his consent anyway."

"Did he ever hit you?"

"He wouldn't dare. He worshiped Connie."

"Did he ever box?"

"You mean fight? I think so. Sometimes he came home from school with his clothes torn or a black eye, but he wouldn't talk about it. That was before he quit. Fighting is normal. We had some of the same problems with our son; he grew out of it."

I was coming to the short end. "Any scrapes with the law? Joseph, I mean."

She shook her head. Her eyes were warm and tawny. "You know, you're quite goodlooking. You have noble features."

"So does a German shepherd."

"I work in clay. I'd like to

have you pose for me in my studio sometime." She waved long nails toward a door to the left. "I specialize in nudes."

"So do I. But not with clients' wives." I rose.

She lifted penciled eyebrows. "Was I that obvious?"

"Probably not, but I'm a detective." I thanked her and got my hat and let myself out.

Xanthes had told me his half brother got off at four. At ten to, I swung by the market and bought two quarts of strawberries. The beefy bald man, whom I'd pegged as Butsukitis, the owner, appeared glad to see me. Memories are long in Greektown. I said, "I just had an operation and the doc says I shouldn't lift any more than five pounds. Could your boy carry these to the car?"

"I let my boy leave early. Slow day. I will carry them."

He did, and I drove away stuck with two quarts of strawberries. They give me hives. Had Santine been around I'd planned to tail him after he punched out. Beating the steering wheel at red lights, I bucked and squirmed my way through late afternoon traffic to Gratiot, where my man kept an apartment on the second floor of a charred brick building that had housed a recording studio in the gravy days of Motown. I ditched

my hat, jacket, and tie in the car and at Santine's door put on a pair of aviator's glasses in case he remembered me from the market. If he answered my knock, I was looking for another apartment. There was no answer. I considered slipping the latch and taking a look around inside, but it was too early in the round to play catch with my license. I went back down and made myself uncomfortable in my heap across the street from the entrance.

It was growing dark when a cab creaked its brakes in front of the building and Santine got out, wearing a blue windbreaker over the clothes I'd seen him in earlier. He paid the driver and went inside. Since the window of his apartment looked out on Gratiot I let the cab go, noting its number, hit the starter, and wound my way to the company's headquarters on Woodward.

A puffy-faced black man in work clothes looked at me from behind a steel desk in an office smelling of oil. The floor tingled with the swallowed bellowing of engines in the garage below. I gave him a hinge at my investigator's photostat, placing my thumb over the "Private," and told him in an official voice I wanted information on the cab in question.

He looked back down at the ruled pink sheet he was scrib-

bling on and said, "I been dispatcher here eleven years. You think I don't know a plastic badge when I see one?"

I licked a ten dollar bill across the sheet.

"That's Dillard," he said, watching the movement.

"He just dropped off a fare on Gratiot." I gave him the address. "I want to know where he picked him up and when."

He found the cab number on another ruled sheet attached to a clipboard on the wall and followed the line with his finger to some writing in another column. "Evergreen, between Schoolcraft and Kendall. Dillard logged it in at six twenty."

I handed him the bill without comment. The spot where Santine had entered the cab was an hour's easy walk from where the bodies of two of the murdered women had been found.

I swung past Joe Santine's apartment near Greektown on my way home. There was a light on. That night after supper I caught all the news reports on TV and looked for bulletins and wound up watching a succession of sitcoms full of single mothers shrieking at their kids about sex. There was nothing about any new stranglings. I went to bed. Eating breakfast next day I turned on the radio and read the *Free Press*. There was still nothing.

The name of the psychiatrist quoted in the last issue was Kornecki. I looked him up and called his office in the National Bank building. I expected a secretary, but I got him.

"I'd like to talk to you about someone I know," I said.

"Someone you know. I see." He spoke in cathedral tones.

"It's not me. I have an entirely different set of neuroses."

"My consultation fee is one hundred dollars for forty minutes."

"I'll take twenty-five dollars' worth," I said.

"No, that's for forty minutes or any fraction thereof. I have a cancellation at eleven. Shall I have my secretary pencil you in when she returns from her break?"

I told him to do so, gave him my name, and rang off before I could say anything about his working out of a bank. The hundred went onto the expense sheet.

Kornecki's reception room was larger than my office by half. A redhead at a kidney-shaped desk smiled tightly at me and found my name on her calendar, and buzzed me through. The inner sanctum, pastel green with a blue carpet, dark green naugahyde couch, and a large glass-topped desk bare but for a telephone intercom, looked out on downtown through a window whose double panes

swallowed the traffic noise. Behind the desk, a man about my age, wearing a blue pinstripe and steel-rimmed glasses, sat smiling at me with several thousand dollars' worth of dental work. He wore his sandy hair in bangs like Alfalfa.

We shook hands and I took charge of the customer's chair, a pedestal job upholstered in green vinyl to match the couch. I asked if I could smoke. He said whatever made me comfortable and indicated a smoking stand nearby. I lit up and laid out Santine's background without naming him. Kornecki listened.

"Is this guy capable of violence against strange women?" I finished.

He smiled again. "We all are, Mr. Walker. Every one of us men; it's our only advantage. You think your man is the strangler, is that it?"

"I guess I was absent the day they taught subtle."

"Oh, you were subtle. But you can't know how many people I've spoken with since that article appeared, wanting to be assured that their uncle or cousin or best friend isn't the killer. Hostility between the sexes is nothing new, but these last few confusing years have aggravated things. From what you've told me, though, I don't think you need to worry."

Those rich tones rumbling up

from his slender chest made you want to look around to see who was talking. I waited, smoking.

"The powder is there," he went on. "But it needs a spark. If your man were to start murdering women, his second wife would have been his first victim. He wouldn't have stopped at beating her. My own theory is that the strangler suffered some real or imagined wrong at a woman's hand in his past, and that recently the wrong was repeated, either by a similar act committed by another woman, or by his coming into contact with the same woman."

"What sort of wrong?"

"It could be anything. Sexual domination is the worst because it means loss of self-esteem. Possibly she worked for a living, but it's just as likely that he equates women who work with her dominance. They would be a substitute; he would lack the courage to strike out at the actual source of his frustration."

"Suppose he ran into his mother or something like that."

He shook his head. "Too far back. I don't place as much importance on early childhood as many of my colleagues. Stale charges don't explode that easily."

"You've been a big help," I said, and we talked about sports and politics until my hundred

dollars were up.

From there I went to the Detroit *News* and Barry Stackpole's cubicle, where he greeted me with the lopsided grin the silver plate in his head had left him with after some rough trade tried to blow him up in his car. He pointed to a stack of papers on his desk. I sat on one of the antique whisky crates he uses to file things in—there was a similar stack on the only other chair besides his—and went through the stuff. It had come over the wire that morning from the Des Moines agency and the *Express*, and none of it was for me. Santine had held six jobs in his last two years in Iowa, fetch-and-carry work, no brains need apply. His first wife had divorced him on grounds of marriage breakdown and he hadn't contested the action. His second had filed for extreme cruelty. The transcripts of that one were ugly but not uncommon. There were enough articles from the newspaper on violent crimes against women to make you think twice about moving there, but if there was a pattern it was lost on me. The telephone rang while I was reshuffling the papers. Barry barked his name into the receiver, paused, and held it out to me.

"I gave my service this number," I explained, accepting it.

"You bastard, you promised to call me before you called the police."

The voice belonged to Constantine Xanthes. I straightened. "Start again."

"Joseph just called me from police headquarters. They've arrested him for the stranglings."

I met Xanthes in Homicide. He was wearing the same light blue suit or one just like it and his face was pale beneath the olive pigment. "He's being interrogated now," he said stiffly. "My lawyer's with him."

"I didn't call the cops." I made my voice low. The room was alive with uniforms and detectives in shirtsleeves droning into telephones and comparing criminal anecdotes at the water cooler.

"I know. When I got here, Inspector DeLong told me that Joseph walked into some kind of trap."

On cue, DeLong entered the squad room from the hallway leading to Interrogation. His jacket was off and his shirt clung, transparent, to his narrow chest. When he saw me his eyes flamed. "You said you were representing a victim's family."

"I didn't," I corrected. "You did. What's this trap?"

He grinned to his molars. "It's the kind of thing you do in these things when you did

everything else. Sometimes it works. We had another strangling last night."

My stomach took a dive. "It wasn't on the news."

"We didn't release it. The body was jammed into a culvert on Schoolcraft. When we got the squeal we threw wraps over it, morgued the corpse—she was a teacher at Redford High—and stuck a department store dummy in its place. These nuts like publicity; when there isn't any they might check to see if the body is still there. So Santine climbs down the bank at half past noon and takes a look inside and three officers step out of the bushes and screw their service revolvers in his ears."

"Pretty thin," I said.

"How thick does it have to be with a full confession?"

Xanthes swayed. I grabbed his arm. I was still looking at DeLong.

"He's talking to a tape recorder now," he said, filling a Dixie cup at the cooler. "He knows the details on all five murders, including the blow to the cheek."

"I'd like to see him." Xanthes was still pale, but he wasn't needing me to hold him up now.

"It'll be a couple of hours."

"I'll wait."

The inspector shrugged, drained the cup, and headed back the way he'd come, side-

arming the crumpled container at a steel wastebasket already bubbling over with them. Xanthes said, "He didn't do it."

"I think he probably did." I was somersaulting a Winston back and forth across the back of my hand. "Is your wife home?"

He started slightly. "Grace? She's shopping for art supplies in Southfield. I tried to reach her after the police called, but I couldn't."

"I wonder if I could have a look at her studio."

"Why?"

"I'll tell you in the car." When he hesitated:

"It beats hanging around here."

He nodded. In my crate I said, "Your father was proud of his Greek heritage, wasn't he?"

"Fiercely. He was a stonecutter in the old country and he was built like Hercules. He taught me the importance of being a man and the sanctity of womanhood. That's why I can't understand..." He shook his head, watching the scenery glide past his window.

"I can. When a man who's been told all his life that a man should be strong lets himself be manipulated by a woman, it does things to him. If he's smart, he'll put distance between himself and the woman. If he's weak, he'll come back and it'll start all over again. And if the woman happens to be married

to his half brother, whom he worships—"

I stopped, feeling the flinty chips of his eyes on me. "Who told you that?"

"Your wife, some of it. You, some more. The rest of it I got from a psychiatrist downtown. The women's movement has changed the lives of almost everyone but the women who have the most to lose by embracing it. Your wife's been cheating on you for years."

"Liar!" He lunged across the seat at me. I spun the wheel hard and we shrieked around a corner and he slammed back against the passenger's door. A big Mercury that had been close on our tail blatted its horn and sped past. Xanthes breathed heavily, glaring.

"She propositioned me like a pro yesterday." I corrected our course. We were entering his neighborhood now. "I think she's been doing that kind of thing a long time. I think that when he was living at your place Joseph found out and threatened to tell you. That would have meant divorce from a proud man like you, and your wife would have had to go to work to support herself and the children. So she bribed Joseph with the only thing she had to bribe him with. She's still attractive, but in those days she must have been a knockout; being weak; he took the bribe, and then she

had leverage. She hedged her bet by making up those stories about his incorrigible behavior so that you wouldn't believe him if he did tell you. So he got out from under. But the experience had plundered him of his self-respect and tainted his relationships with women from then on.

"Even then he might have grown out of it, but he made the mistake of coming back. Seeing her again shook something loose. He walked into your house Joe Santine and came out the Five O'Clock Strangler, victimizing seemingly independent WASP women like Grace. Who taught him how to use his fists?"

"Our father, probably. He taught me. It was part of a man's training, he said, to know how to defend himself." His voice was as dead as last year's leaves.

We pulled into his driveway and he got out, moving very slowly. Inside the house we paused before the locked door to his wife's studio. I asked him if he had a key.

"No. I've never been inside the room. She's never invited me and I respect her privacy."

I didn't. I slipped the lock with the edge of my investiga-

tor's photostat and we entered Grace Xanthes' trophy room.

It had been a bedroom, but she had erected steel utility shelves and moved in a kiln and a long library table on which stood a turning pedestal supporting a lump of red clay that was starting to look like a naked man. The shelves were lined with nude male figure studies twelve to eighteen inches high, posed in various heroic attitudes. They were all of a type, athletically muscled and wide at the shoulders, physically large, all the things the artist's husband wasn't. He walked around the room in a kind of daze, staring at each in turn. It was clear he recognized some of them. I didn't know Joseph at first, but he did. He had filled out since seventeen.

I returned two days' worth of Xanthes' three-day retainer, less expenses, despite his insistence that I'd earned it. A few weeks later court-appointed psychiatrists declared Joe Santine mentally unfit to stand trial and he was remanded for treatment to the State Forensics Center at Ypsilanti. And I haven't had a bowl of egg lemon soup or a slice of feta cheese in months.

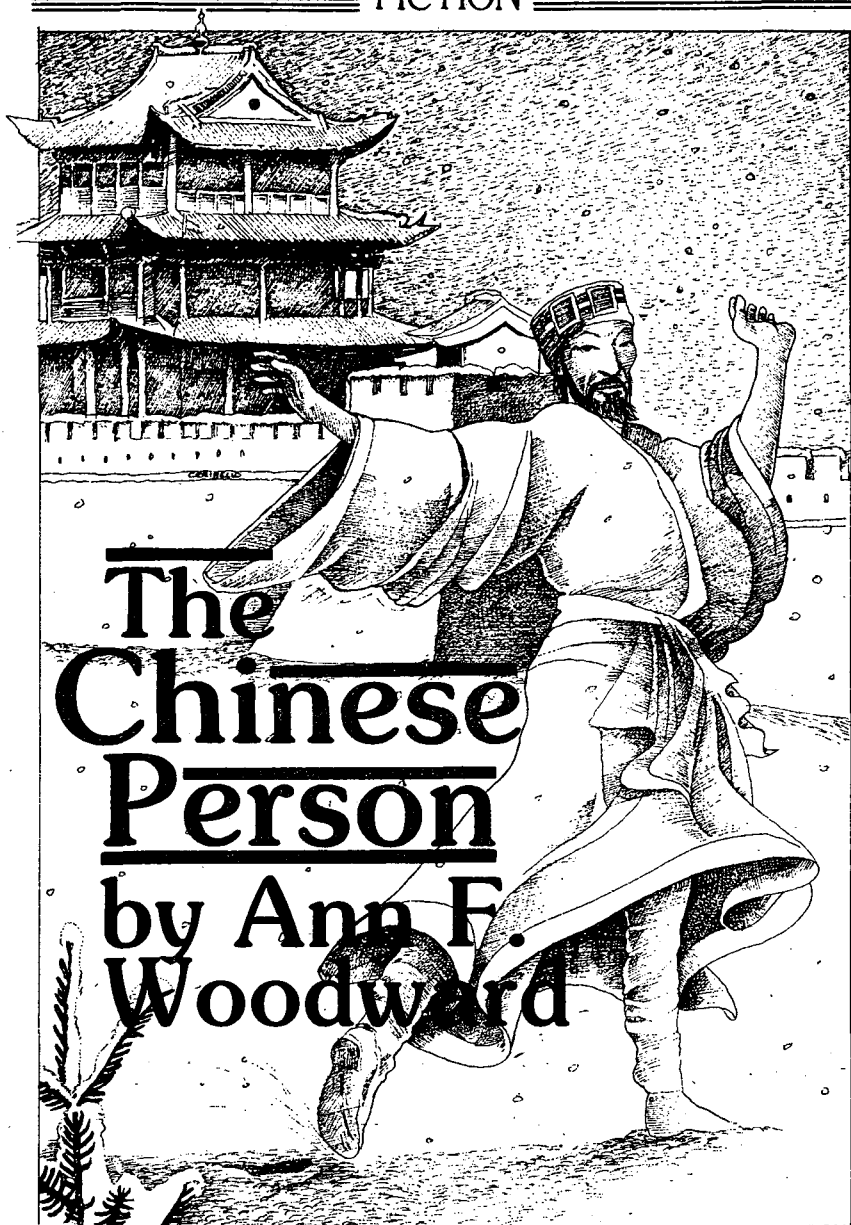


Illustration by Jim Ceribello

The Lady Aoi woke early in the cold darkness before dawn. She felt the keen chill of the air on her face and the slide of silk against her chin. Under layers of bedding she was warm, with a drowsiness unfamiliar for many years now. Her eyes saw no light when she opened them, but faint sounds from the nearby kitchen told her the palace would soon be waking. Somehow she knew it had snowed. There was a stillness and muted quiet about her that she had not felt since the cold weather came. Usually she found the winter depressing, and so she wondered why she had such a strong pulse of well-being from this early waking. She felt that when the maid came in to blow new fire into the charcoal in the brazier, it would be more pleasure than she could bear. She turned her face as the door slid open so the girl would not see her smiling.

When the charcoal glowed red, the girl got up to go on to the next lady's room, but Aoi stopped her with a gesture and had her raise the heavy door that shut off the veranda side of the room. And there was the snow, lying blue and lavish in the early light, draped and mounded and flecked across the garden, unblemished and pure. Rising, Aoi adjusted her clothes and sat beside the brazier with paper and brush and ink. She wrote surely and quickly.

Stiff and brown and jagged lay
This garden, nervous in the wind.
Now see what peace has fallen
With the snow.

Other verses came but she let them go, and sat until it was full light. Then she turned to her breakfast, which had been brought some time before. The still-warm soup was another blessing of this winter morning.

As soon as Aoi was fully dressed for the day, she passed into the long corridors of the palace, on her way to attend the princess in the royal apartments. Everywhere the outside doors had been opened to admit the view of the snow and the still winter day. Colors glowed in reflected light, and the cold only added speed to the steps of everyone she met. Hearing the quick, light greetings of the other ladies-in-waiting in the princess's rooms, Aoi realized that she was not alone in her joyous response to the season's first snow.

It was in the midst of animated talk from a dozen ladies that

The Chinese Person appeared in the snow-covered garden. A man, taller than average, wearing the robes of a Chinese scholar, ran swooping across the courtyard, spinning with his arms outspread, his long sleeves flashing about him, celebrating in a mute dance the beauty of the snow. The faces of all the ladies stiffened with dismay, and they looked fearfully at the princess. At the same time, the low but clearly heard voice of the young chancellor reached them from across the garden.

"Father! Father! What are you doing?"

The old man in Chinese dress turned and turned, not answering.

"Don't you know that no one ever walks on fresh snow? Now you've ruined it, who will want to look at it like that?"

Shaking his head and stepping as if he wished not to touch the ground, the young man dashed to his father and jerked him toward the opposite veranda.

"Who is that Chinese person?" the princess said. "He must be a poet, to love the snow so much. Ask if he will come to see me, I want to talk with him."

Aoi thought afterwards that it must have been another effect of that unusual morning that made the princess take such an attitude toward a serious lack of manners. Usually she was as strict and severe with others as she was with herself. Her prince, who gave her much to complain of, would have no complaints of her or of those about her. It seemed to Aoi that it was because of her efforts to counterbalance her roving husband's faults that the princess was always aware of serious feeling in others. It was a rather surprised lady-in-waiting who was sent to summon the young chancellor's father.

So it was that The Chinese Person came to court. This term, by which the princess had first spoken of him, became his name, though he was not Chinese at all. Actually, he had been born near the capital, but he had lived when he was young in China. He could recite the poetry of Li Po and write it as well, in a beautiful hand. He could talk for hours about the dress and customs and manners of the Chinese. He told stories and tales, laughing and gesturing, his whole person mobile and vivid with the telling. He sang in a thin sweet voice that made the ladies weep. They thought him odd, especially because his son was so proper. But he charmed and entertained them, and the princess grew so fond of him that she had him moved to rooms near her part of the palace, ordering the finest furnishings for his use.

Soon after that, he appeared in Aoi's garden. She often sat with the outer door raised because, in spite of the snow, the cold was not severe and she liked the brightness. She had not expected a visitor and was startled to see him balancing on high wooden clogs, tipping along under the eaves. A page came behind him, carrying two pheasants tied to pine branches.

"Not this time!" he called. "A man doesn't make that kind of mistake but once. I'm over here at the edge, where it's safe to walk."

Stepping out of his clogs, he mounted the veranda and had the boy lay the birds just so on the polished boards, then sent him away. He greeted Aoi with a serious and gentle look, his voice dropping to a low, even tone. He seemed transformed, clothed with a dignity she had not yet seen in him, even with the princess.

"They tell me, lady, that you know medicines and herbs. I think we will find much to talk about."

To cover her surprise, Aoi turned to examine the birds.

"How lovely they are! But there doesn't seem to be a mark on them!"

"Oh, yes. Here." He showed her where the skulls were broken. "I use throwing stones. They don't show the damage."

When Aoi questioned him about this unusual way of killing birds, he said that it was just another Chinese trick.

"Yes, I know a lot of Chinese tricks," he said, with a smile that was somewhat wry, showing her a handful of heavy, smooth stones. He told her it was as a member of a travelling group of Chinese acrobats that he had crossed the sea to that great country at the center of the world. He had been only a boy when they came to entertain the nobles in the town where he lived, and when they left he went with them, too fascinated to resist. He learned the juggling, the tumbling, the language, the cooking, the medicines, the literature, the rules of logic, the ways across the mountains, and the ways of the bazaars.

"I went everywhere, I learned everything. And I taught a lot of it to that son of mine, but he won't admit to much more than the writing."

"That skill is a great help to him in his position," said Aoi.

He only looked at her and did not reply. She remembered his son's roughness on that first morning and understood that, though the young chancellor was highly placed at court, he was in some ways a disappointment to his father.

Aoi sent for extra cushions and asked her maid to bring the proper utensils for making tea. She felt sure that this man who had so much experience of China would know the social uses of tea, as well as the medicinal ones.

When hot water was set before him, as well as finely rolled tea leaves and thin cups, he made the brew himself, at her request, talking easily about the old custom of adding salt. They sat together like old friends throughout the afternoon. He asked how she had come to know Chinese medicine, and she told him of her tantrums and rages as a child, to force her father to teach her Chinese along with her brothers; of her husband, who had helped her collect scrolls that described healing plants and methods of massage; of her grief when he died after only five years of marriage, leaving her childless; of the need to conceal from the spiteful court her unwomanly ability to read and write Chinese; of her devotion to the princess and her pleasure in being useful to her and to others as one who can often relieve pain and soothe tiredness.

Aoi was aware that she was speaking freely and at length. He listened well, sitting quietly, nodding as he absorbed what she said, sometimes adding comments or asking questions. Their manner became more animated as the tea had its effect, and they were laughing when the young chancellor came by to fetch his father back to his room.

"His heart is not strong, you understand," the young man said. "I ask him to rest but he . . ."

"Hah! Rest! Rest!" The old man almost shouted at his son. He seemed about to explode. "He would like it if I were to rest my life away, up there in the country. Then I would never come here to embarrass him by breaking some exquisite little rule. Some rule that no one but a court fop would have thought of in the first place."

He held his breath and closed his eyes to calm himself.

"Goodbye, lady. It has been a pleasure to speak of worthwhile things."

Collecting his clogs from the garden, he left, fending off his son's solicitous gestures and helping hand. The young chancellor turned an exasperated smile to Aoi and followed, his cheek pale.

The weather grew warmer, and the snow melted. Then the cold became severe and the palace was dark, every door closed against the wind. The ladies sat by their braziers, enduring, leaving one island of warmth only to hurry to the next. During this time, Aoi heard several tales about the young chancellor's troubles with his

father: how he had drunk too much wine and given a juggling exhibition, how he had corrected the Chinese of the grand chancellor himself and, to make it worse, explained at length the way to remember which character to use. The princess laughed at these stories and called him to her nearly every day. On the heels of the cold came more snow, heavy and wet, not deep but dreary, without the lightness and dazzle of that first snow.

Again Aoi woke in the early hours, this time roused by a sobbing maid.

"What is it?" Aoi could not keep the sharpness from her voice. She felt irritated and grasped the covers to close a gap the girl had opened in, shaking her shoulder. Her eyes felt swollen, her feet were cold.

"Please come, my lady." Aoi's crossness had frightened away the girl's tears. "Please come, it's The Chinese Person."

"Is he sick?" Aoi spoke more gently.

"Well, we don't know. Please come."

She helped Aoi to stand and put on a warm coat. In the hall were two more girls, their figures dark against the pale squares of a paper-covered window, their heads together. They spoke in whispers.

"I know we shouldn't have, my lady, but we like to watch him in the mornings."

They leaned together to gather courage, then explained. From a certain window in the hall near The Chinese Person's room, they had observed his strange morning ritual. Every day he opened the door and walked onto the veranda, carrying a long pole and dressed in trousers and a short shirt, with tight wrappings on his legs and about his waist. Then he swung the pole, jumped it, threw it up and caught it, swept it around at arm's length and performed all sorts of contortions and lunging movements with it. Through their nervous tears, the girls were laughing.

"Please excuse us, but he is very funny."

"But this morning, my lady," they said, "he is just lying in the snow."

Aoi hurried them forward until they arrived at the place. The girls showed her the window, and she could see a figure sprawled in the garden, just in front of the veranda of an open room. Sending the maids to find some men to lift him, and to look for the young chancellor, Aoi found the door of the room and entered from the corridor.

The veranda was dry, protected from the snow by the roof. Aoi knelt at the edge and looked carefully at the old man's body. There was no movement at all. He lay face down, one leg straight, one bent up, as if he had leaped and fallen flat. The pole had sunk into the snow to his right, the only mark on the unbroken expanse of white that smothered the courtyard. Since she could not raise him and was sure that he was dead, Aoi stayed where she was, looking carefully at the whole scene.

Two manservants arrived, and she had them put him on the veranda, where the light was stronger than in the shadowy room. She had just determined that there was no heartbeat when the prince came in, surrounded by men of the palace and followed immediately by the young chancellor. They asked Aoi only if he still lived.

"Ah, I am so sorry . . ." There was no need to complete the sentence.

"Father, if you had only done as I asked you!"

Aoi had expected extravagant lamentations from the young chancellor, but he controlled himself and took charge of his father's body, insisting that he be moved to a more comfortable place inside the room and sending for maids to clean his face, which was dirty and wet. He explained to the prince about his father's weak heart and how he had feared some sudden event like this. Aoi felt herself in the way and left.

She hurried through the cold, dark corridors, pressing her arms across her waist, chilled and dismally sad. Back in her room, she found a bloodstain on her sleeve. This set her thinking and she stayed all morning by the brazier, sending her excuses to the princess. Once she moved to the wooden chest where she kept her precious scrolls and drew out several until she found the one she wanted.

"If there be a man who moves himself about with vigor every day, that man will never fall down dead because his heart has stopped." There was more, but it was this sentence Aoi had remembered.

He had kept up his tumbling skills, or perhaps fighting skills; Aoi did not know what he had been doing, but the maids had said it was vigorous and that they had watched him every morning. She looked again at the stain on her sleeve and dipped the cloth in water to be sure. It could only be blood.

After thinking a long while more, she knew that there were

things that must be done and that she could not do them herself. She sent for an old manservant she knew she could trust, gave him careful instructions, and told him to make haste.

Still chilled and suddenly hungry, she asked for food and warm rice wine. She sat remembering the kind eyes of The Chinese Person, his laugh that began as a heave of the chest, the long-spun stories told to the princess and her ladies, and the contrastingly serious, gentle-spoken man who had come to visit her, the gorgeous Chinese robe, always the same one, and the strange wrappings he had worn when she found him dead. He had interested her and had become, in one afternoon, her friend.

The manservant returned just at dusk.

"Did you find it?" Aoi asked.

"Yes, my lady, you were right. It landed just ahead of where he fell, looked like there was a hole in the snow and at the bottom, there it was."

"Ah." Aoi let out her breath, only now aware that she had been tense.

"And you questioned the maids?"

"Well, questioning might not have been the thing. I said I guessed the poor old man had died from falling down. They said they'd heard he could fall on purpose and land right back on his feet. I said, well, anyone could make a misstep. They said his heart had stopped. I said they must have had a job to clean him up. They said no, there was only a little blood on his temple where he had fallen on a rock. They said why don't you go fall off a veranda, old man, and let us do our work."

He shook with laughter, then looked intently at Aoi.

"There was no rock where his head had been."

Aoi nodded and asked for the thing he had found in the snow. It fell heavy and cold into her hand.

"He's gone already," the old man said. "That young chancellor took him off in an oxcart, up to the country there."

Aoi thanked him and gave him a fine silk robe as payment.

Three days later, the young chancellor returned to his duties in the prince's quarters, only to find another young man in his place. The prince refused to see him, but Aoi requested that he call on her.

When he arrived, he found her sitting in near darkness, without a warming fire. She let him sit on the cold boards of the floor, not offering a cushion. Her voice, when she spoke, was grave and slow.

"We mourn your poor father," she said. "The princess and all of us were quite fond of him."

She could see the relaxation of the man before her as he bowed his head, prepared to accept sympathy.

"A son should respect his father," she said, "but instead . . ."

There was a sudden clattering noise and the wooden outer door was raised, letting in the light from outside. The old manservant stood grinning in the corner. The former chancellor gasped and looked around, then laughed in a nervous way and turned back to Aoi. In the light he could see a small white square of folded silk on the floor before her. In its center lay a black stone, smooth and rounded.

"I see that you know this for one of your father's throwing stones."

The young man moved quickly to rise, but the manservant's hands fell on his shoulders, holding him down.

"You were ashamed of him. When you found those girls spying on him, you wanted to be rid of him. Trying to worry him about his heart was useless, he knew his heart was strong. He taught you, didn't he, how to throw stones? This time there was blood where it hit, on the temple. He fell face down, there was no stone on the ground to wound him. But this stone—it was the only thing in the garden not covered with snow. This stone you threw and killed him, then he fell."

When he started to speak, she stopped him.

"You have no more friends in this palace. I cannot prove what you did, but I have spoken to the princess and she to the prince. We will not see you here again. Your house has been given to the new man, and you will not find employment in the capital. The people in your village know what you did."

Now the old man removed his hands, and the young one stood up.

"You will find it hard to live without friends," Aoi said. She turned away, uninterested in his reaction, only wanting him gone. As she dripped water to prepare for writing, she heard his rapid footsteps in hollow echo from down the empty corridor.

Today there is no fire here,
My room is gray and dim, cold
As a heavy stone of black.

She put the brush aside and sat on in the dimness.

OFF THE RECORD

A Cast of Characters
by Barbara Ninde Byfield

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The "classic English mystery" has long been a favorite of mystery readers, with its comfortable settings, its array of clues to be sorted out, and the puzzle it sets forth for the reader to solve. The formula has become a familiar one, but it remains popular and beloved. Below, for the fun of it, an assemblage of the classic characters that inhabit its world, with a guide to their foibles and their sometimes unsuspected strengths—and a guide, through them, to the classic English mystery as well.*



The Letter

The best classics begin with a certain opulence, if you please. (Things can always get grubby later.) Hortense, the maid, is paid less per quarter than Milady gave for her pretty little evening slippers, and both feel that is as it should be. Without a wardrobe, after all, Milady would have no need for a maid, hmm?

When questioned later about what it was in the morning post that so upset her ladyship, Hortense cannot say exactly. It was quickly locked into the jewel case on the dressing table. But yes, it was written on cheap and shoddy paper, and the stamp on the envelope . . . from somewhere foreign-like, abroad, and the post-mark was blurred.

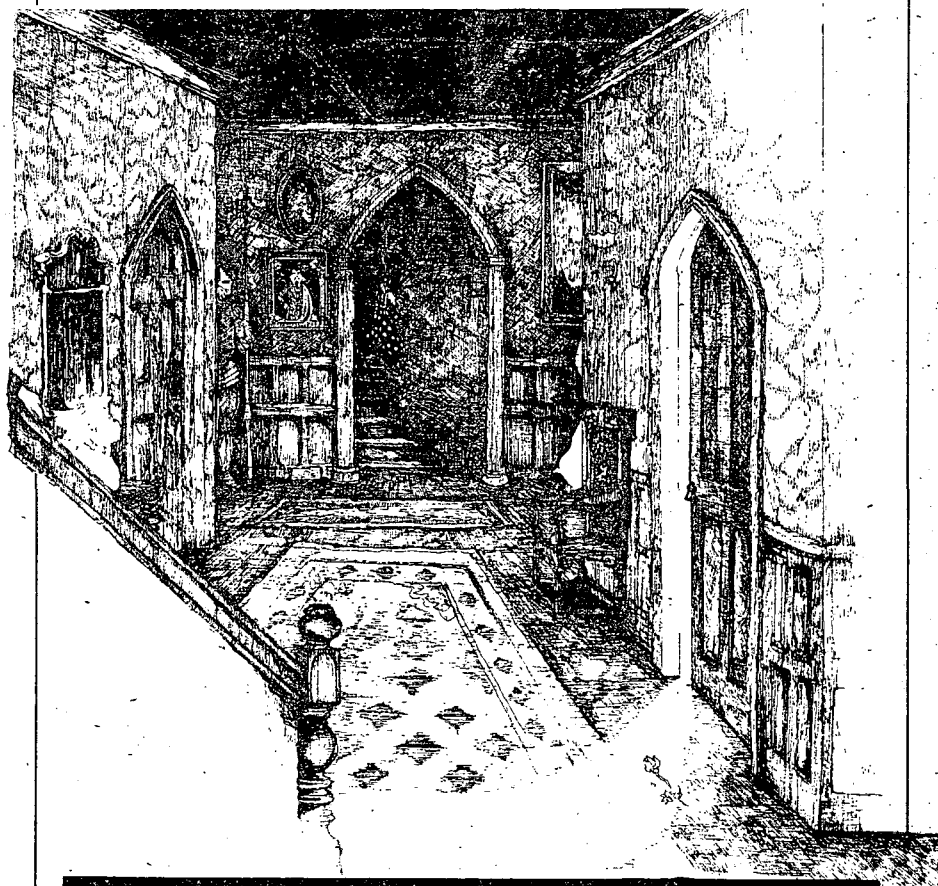
Finding the Body

This inevitable event may occur as early as Chapter II, but if so, there will ordinarily be other bodies to find later. Whichever the case, there is a chronic reluctance to acknowledge foul play. Every effort is made to justify the slit throat, the head in the gas oven, the week of immersion in the frozen pond with an engine block chained to the corpse's feet as the natural result of an accident whilst shaving, as overdoing a bit a sudden nighttime hunger pang, or as a curious passion for swimming in January.

However, murder it is, and the Squire and the Village Constable have their work cut out. The body must be guarded by the unfortunate policeman whilst the Squire, who has been

stumping about his demesne in search of poachers, now stumps as quickly as his gout allows back to The Hall to telephone . . . The Yard!

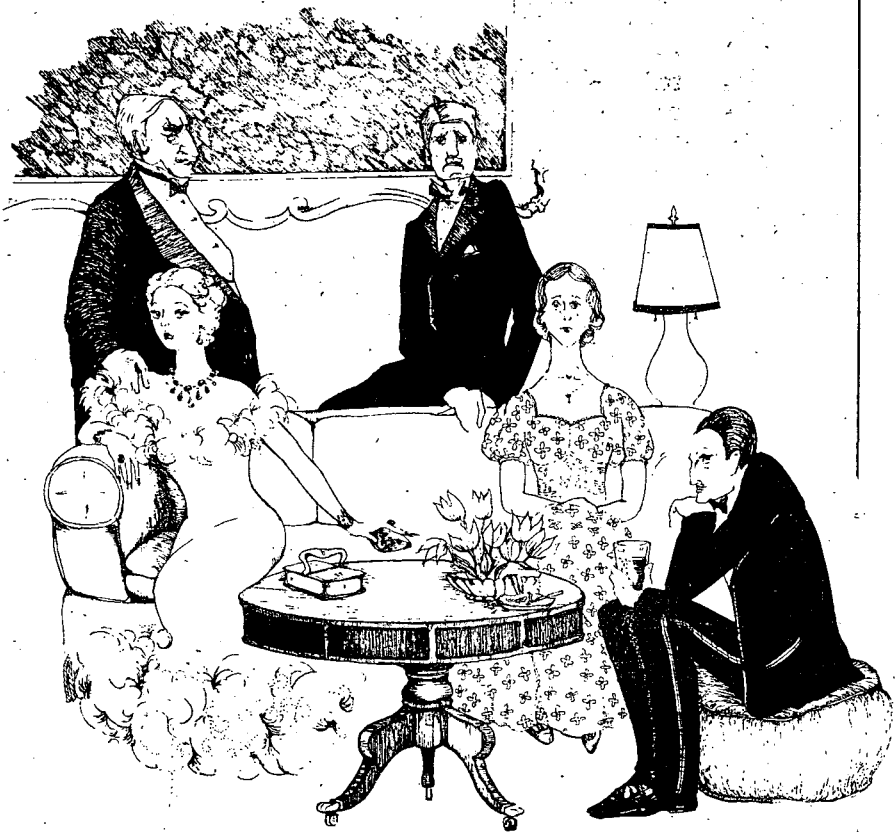




Waiting for The Yard

At the Hall, Grange, Priory, Stately Home, the Houseparty assembles in frozen apprehension. Fortunately, it is just after dinner, since they will be up most of the night. Eschewing their usual backgammon, bil-

liards, or bridge, they attempt to keep from eyeing each other with suspicion, terror, or hysterics. At least one smokes too many cigarettes, another rips a handkerchief to shreds, dentures are ground.



Below stairs, Cook directs her minions to cut sandwiches and make coffee against the arrival of the Force. The Butler directs a footman to bung a new keg of beer, and himself tops up the cognac and sherry decan-

ters and transports them, with a fresh bottle of seltzer, Upstairs.

Then, and all ears are cocked, the sound of cars on the sweep of the gravel drive . . .

Meanwhile, Back at the Flat

Whether the Detective is the charming and gifted cadet of an aristocratic family who has carved his niche as an amateur detective, or a professional and very important official with the Force, the Detective will have a flat, a manservant, and a Mama.

The Mama has long been accustomed to coming to tea at The Flat, only to find her youngest-born plucked untimely from his scones and muffins. She makes do with aplomb, the gastronomic ministrations of the manservant (whose name is *not* Aplomb), and a thoughtful telephone call from the scene of the crime to assure the Mama he is indeed wearing his very warmest mackintosh.

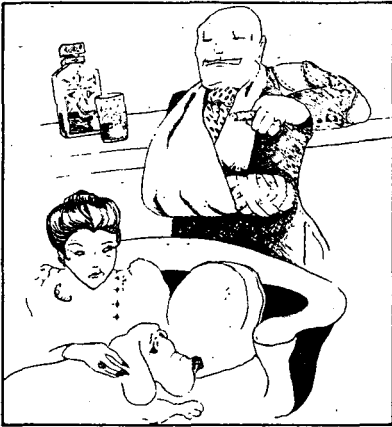


Alibis, Established and Destroyed

Country House, Town House, or Railway Carriage: all are exactly the same. Only a certain group of people Could Have Done It.

And yet, none of them could have. They were all in each other's company, coupled in croquet, observed by three others staking the delphiniums with solitary responsibility, closeted in the business room with the estate agent. The Doctor is left-handed, thin, and not tall enough; the Baron was playing bridge; the cross-channel swimmer Madeleine brought for the weekend has a documented fear of heights and could not have scaled the stable clock tower. Milady is too frail.

But at a later point, "facts" only serve as stimulus for the Detective; he strikes straight for the jugular in at least one case.

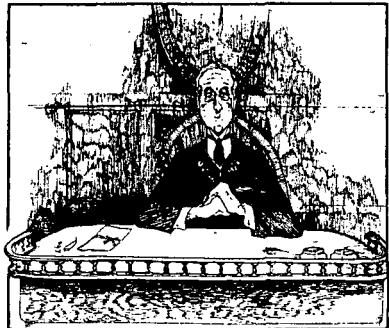


Unfortunately, it is not the operative one, and he, ever the gent, assures the lady that her peccadillo—an indiscreet weekend, or the substitution of false pearls for real—is not germane to The Crime and need not be published abroad.

Tweeny in Trouble!

Adenoidal, alternately over- and under-worked, occasionally homesick, Tweeny has done Something Terrible. It may have only been lighting a fire where no fire should have been lit, or not changing the blotting paper in the Blue Room. It is not the destruction or suppression of evidence that puts Cook into a fantod, it is That Girl Forgetting Herself that rankles.

Whilst the Family Lawyer is reading the will in the library, the Detective's Watson is below stairs where he has made himself welcome by means of his simple but commanding masculinity and his appreciation of the difficulties of Cook's responsibilities. Tweeny, summoned from scrubbing the curious new stain on the carpet in the east passage, is certain





of a dressing-down from Cook, but nevertheless swears to the necessary: the unslept-in bed,

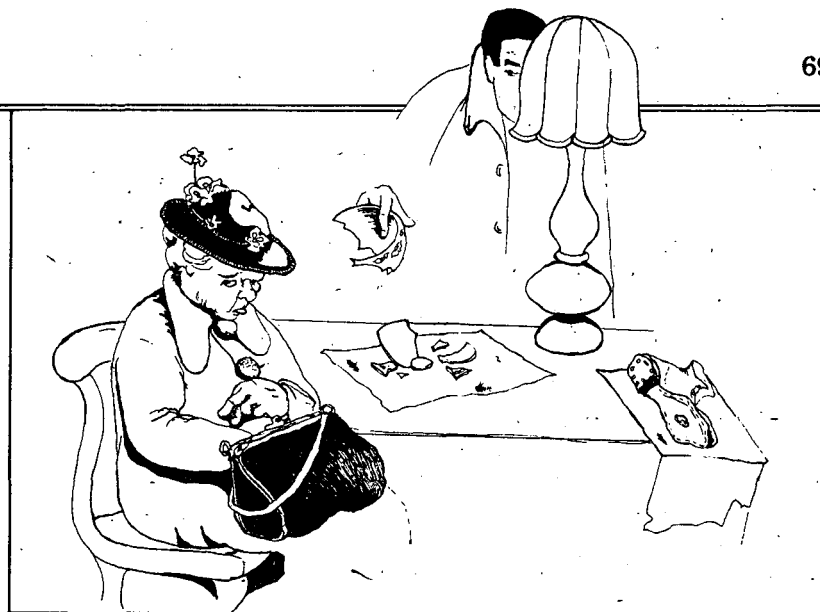
the scullery window found open in the morning, the missing boot scraper!

The Char

If "Watson" is in empathy with the Staff in the country, it is usually the Detective who deals with help in Town. Charladies in particular respond to his suave urbanity. He is, perhaps, the son they would have had if 'er 'Arry 'ad lived.

These redoubtable ladies come in daily "to oblige," are possessed of a key, and very little in the bachelors' establishments they scour and shine can shock them, it is all in a day's work to them. They have their own particular code of ethics which must be understood by their employers. It is always "the cat" that breaks the porcelain, even when there is no cat on the premises; the Detective does well not to push it further unless, as here, it is germane to The Crime.

When pushed further, the Char will break into tears and is best sent home in a taxi.



The Eccentric

Here he is. Old Uncle Cruddy, who has come down from the Tower for a change of scene, as he does every new moon. Make no mistake, he is not locked up, he chooses solitude and has done so since the Event: a terrible War, for instance, or perhaps having witnessed something so beastly in the oast house when he was a boy that he has never recovered.

The Eccentric is very much part of the Family, and is treated considerably and tenderly. Indeed, it is when his dressing gown is being re-lined at long last with the best quality velvet (a sumptuous opera wrap of great antiquity being provided for the interim) that the Lost Document is found, sewn into

a secret pocket or hem and forgotten long ago.



The Vicar

The Vicar should be taken seriously. Of indeterminate age, peniless purse, and boundless optimism, he and his good wife know all secrets and to them all hearts are open. Passionate gardeners, their innocent answer to pleas for assistance in finding the Weapon is, ordinarily, to deny the existence of any such objects in *their* community, although on second thought the Vicar may remember the existence of "Sir Gervase's collection up at The Hall. . . ."



Mrs. Vicar once had a lipstick, it is believed, but lost it.

The Vicar does not know he knows the motive for the sad brutality, but he will unwittingly disclose it if one listens hard enough. Hopelessly naive in the ways of the world, it is the Vicar's wife who is more likely to evoke the beans that fortify one for the next steps in solving the mystery.

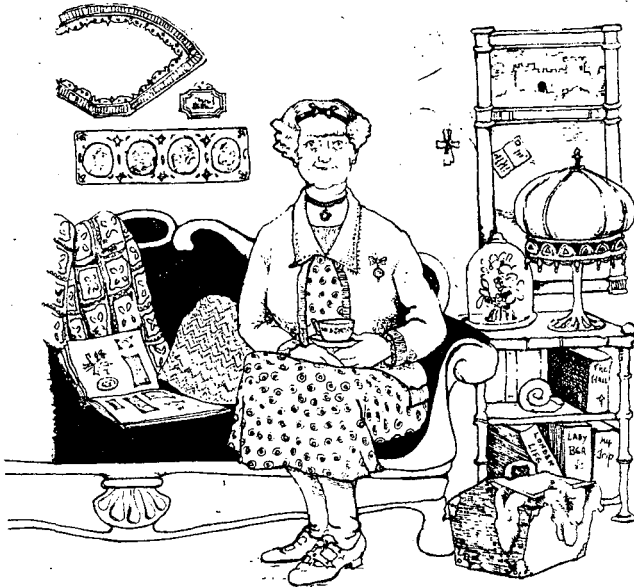
The Retired Companion

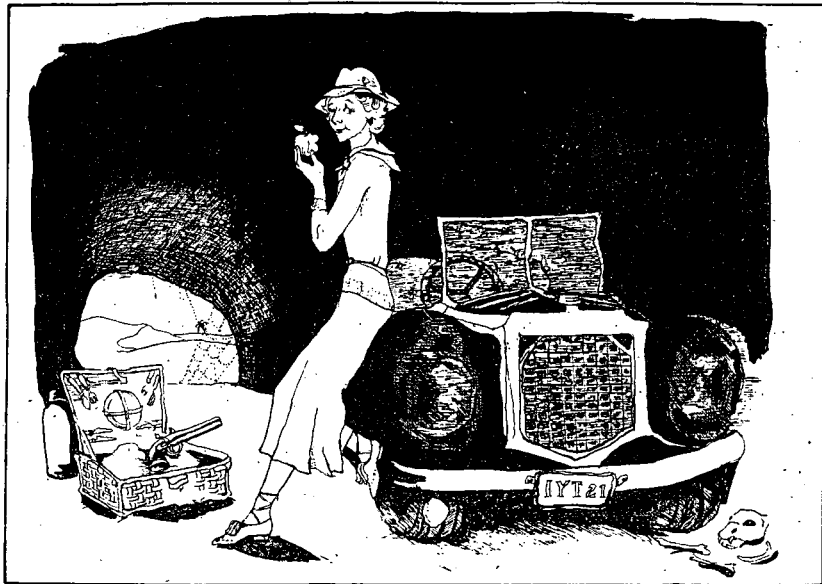
A favored character to provide the Motive can be the Retired Companion. Decades ago, in highly reduced circumstances, she took her post with the Duchess. Now, her long and good services (which included washing the Pekingese) are rewarded with a modest competence, and the Companion has her small cottage and garden, and Memories.

Albums, scrapbooks, old postal cards, bits of lace, dance

programs from "the girls," Christmas remembrances from "the family" surround her; on her yearly week at the seaside she takes brittle and fading photo-snaps of her past life with her, in a worn folding traveling frame.

Coddle this gentlewoman, for somewhere, perhaps in the locket around her neck, perhaps among her collection of Father's regimental buttons, or lost in the vase of pampas grass in the corner, you will find the Motive!





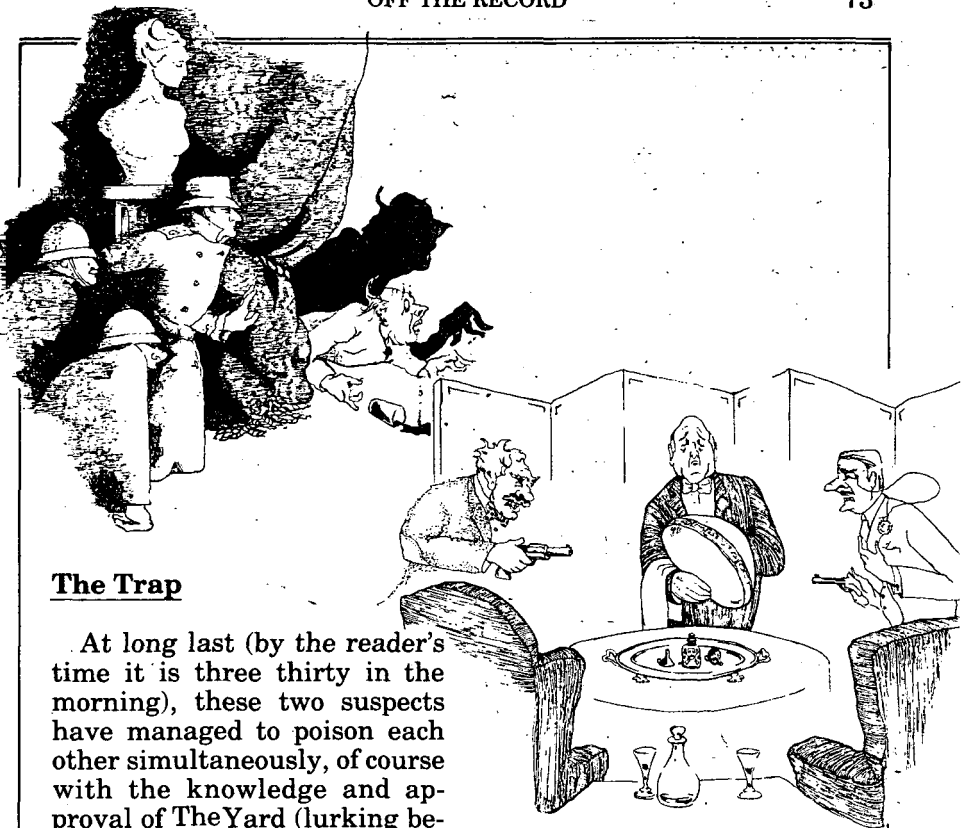
The Intrepid Young Thing

Find her where least expected, doing unexpected things just in the nick of time: providing food and drink, the necessary tool, explosives, woollies and weapons, a hiding place or an escape therefrom.

Grimy hands with bitten nails come with the territory. This girl is just out of school, if she has gone at all, and is chronically hard up although able to keep a rusty old roadster in fighting trim. Someone, a maiden aunt perhaps, has attended to her rearing and manners. This is a girl that can be taken anywhere: seen in an opera box without discredit, or included as an asset on the Chase.

Domesticity has yet to develop, but given her lineage and the inevitability of her choice of a mate (like the Mounties, she always gets her man), she will, in later years unrecorded by her creator, manage a household and staff with one hand tied behind her back, rear bright and beauteous sons, and develop a major interest in spacecraft, sundials, or the secrets of Stonehenge.

Count among her cronies in the country gypsies, tinkers, blacksmiths. In Town, pawnbrokers, taxi drivers, and one very rich and titled banker.



The Trap

At long last (by the reader's time it is three thirty in the morning), these two suspects have managed to poison each other simultaneously, of course with the knowledge and approval of The Yard (lurking behind the folding screen).

The Butler, who had nothing to do with it at all, has been sent (against his principles—observe the inhospitable pinch of his nostrils!) to confront them with the evidence—observe the *two funnels*—in order that this brace of malefactors may flush each other out and incriminate themselves in front of a witness.

Since the reader is now in terminal agony (cracker crumbs among the sheets, a dearth of

cigarettes, itchy eyeballs), he accepts the above on sheer faith; it is too late and too difficult to remember the exact whys and whens. The author must be trusted, the criminals are carried away in a police ambulance to have their stomachs pumped in order that they may appear in due course at Old Bailey.

Time to turn out the light. Justice is done.

FICTION

The Pearson Affair

by Robert Edward Eckels

Most days, like everyone else at Pearson's, Frank Owens either ate at his desk or grabbed a quick sandwich in the company lunchroom, but once a week on Wednesdays he would walk the block and a half down to Barney's on Market Square and eat there. It was a habit that dated

back to the days when Frost had still been chief accountant. He and Frank had gone together then, justifying the extra time as a good chance to talk and plan away from the immediate pressures of the office. That excuse was gone now, of course, now that Frost had retired and Cunningham had

Illustration by Gregg Hinlicky



replaced him. But so far no one had challenged him—a fact that he found vaguely disappointing. In any case, once there his routine was unvarying as perhaps befitted an accountant: a single martini followed by one of the daily specials with coffee afterwards. Today was no different except that instead of

coffee the waiter brought a large bubble glass of brandy.

"From the guy at the bar," he said.

There was only one other customer at the bar, an almost obesely fat man with a small, pink, baby smooth face and glittering eyes. He raised his glass in acknowledgement of Frank's

curious glance, then ambled over to the table and sat down carefully, opposite Frank.

"I trust you'll forgive the intrusion, Mr. Owens," he said. "My name's Grenville, and, no, we've never met. But I think you'll agree it's past time we did."

"If you say so, but I might as well warn you right at the start that I'm not in the market for any stocks, bonds, life insurance, or whatever."

"I never thought you were," Grenville said. "What I have to offer is something rarer by far. A way out." He smiled. "Don't bother to ask a way out from what, Mr. Owens. We both know, and what it takes is money. We both know where the money is, too. Right there at that company of yours, just waiting for someone to reach out and take it."

Frank studied the fat man for a long moment. Finally he said: "What is this? Some kind of a joke?"

Grenville continued to smile faintly. "There's no need to overplay your part, Mr. Owens. You may not know me, but rest assured that I do know you, and what you did once you can easily do again." And still smiling he laid photostats of two Pearson checks totalling a thousand dollars on the table between them.

I

Sanderson, the financial vice president, had called Frank in before the official announcement to tell him that a new chief accountant had been selected—and that it wasn't going to be him.

"No reflection on you," Sanderson had said. "I couldn't be more pleased with the way you've carried on since Frost left and I've told Mr. Pearson that any number of times. But you've got to move with the times. That's why he—we—decided it would be best for the company to bring in new blood."

"I understand," Frank said.

"Sure you do," Sanderson said heartily. He was a stockily built man in his late sixties, who, despite the more than twenty years since the elder Mr. Pearson had brought him in from the field, still felt more at home in a hard hat than in an office suite, particularly in situations like this—which, he told himself firmly, would never have occurred if the old man were still running the company instead of his whippersnapper son. Aloud he went on: "And I don't think you have to worry that there won't be a nice little token, at Christmas, of just how much we think of you."

It was a long time till Christmas and memories could be short, but all Frank said was "Thanks, Milt." Because when you came right down to it what else was there to say? The ball hadn't bounced the way he'd wanted, but at forty-two—with no wife but with a son just entering his teens to support—there was damn little he could do about it except grin and bear it.

The office was unnaturally quiet when he got back to his desk, and Frank wasn't really surprised when a few minutes later one of the other accountants—a tall, gangling man named LeBlanc—drifted over as if casually.

"Welcome back to the enlisted ranks," he said.

"Word gets around, doesn't it?" Frank said.

LeBlanc shrugged. "It's a small world," he said. "And a smaller profession. Sanderson say who the new man's going to be?"

"You tell me."

"Walter Cunningham," LeBlanc said equably. "From Doreco-Remy. Supposed to be a real hotshot whiz kid. Turned Doreco around and looking for new worlds to conquer."

"More power to him."

"So say we all. But anyway—" LeBlanc rubbed his hands together briskly—"some of us are

stopping off after work at the friendly neighborhood pub. We'd like you to join us. Sort of a coming home party, if you know what I mean."

"I know," Frank said. He sighed. "Why not?"

The problem was he wasn't really in a mood for a party. If he had been, it might have turned into a real outpouring and even a catharsis of a sort, because all of them realized that bringing in someone from the outside to head the department meant not only a new beginning but also the end of something old and familiar and comfortable. But as it turned out Frank sat quietly for the most part, letting the conversation wash around him. He had, in fact, just about begun to think it had been a mistake to come at all when he became aware of Lorraine Marshall, the second girl in Sanderson's office, regarding him quizzically. She was a slender woman—early thirties at the most, Frank thought—with a smooth, oval face framed by dark hair that fell down evenly from a center part to just above her shoulders. He had been slightly surprised to find her among LeBlanc's group, since she had joined the company only three months before and hardly qualified as an oldtimer.

"You really don't care, do you?" she said.

There was something faintly mocking in her voice and manner which Frank found more than a little disconcerting.

"You don't even know what I'm talking about, do you?" When he shook his head, she nodded to indicate the other end of the table where LeBlanc, two other accountants, and a tabulating clerk from Payroll were vociferously debating the merits of old movies. "*Four Feathers*," Lorraine said. "Is it the greatest movie ever made or just one of the top five?"

"To tell you the truth, I've never really thought about it much."

"That makes two of us. Do you think we should have?"

"Not particularly."

"Score two for us," Lorraine said. She began to make little wet circles on the table with the end of her glass. "So, anyway, if *you* don't care and *I* don't care, why do we bother staying—particularly when I know a place where the drinks are better and cheaper and the cook makes the best frozen pizza in town."

"Where's that?"

"My apartment—unless, of course, your wife's expecting you home."

"My wife's dead," Frank said.

"I'm sorry."

He shook his head. "There's

no reason to be. It was a long time ago."

She smiled wryly. "I'm still sorry. You must have loved her very much to still wear the ring."

"Yes," Frank said. Had he? He supposed he must, but as he said, it was a long time ago and when he remembered her now it was as a picture, not as a living, vital being. Not as *her*. Maybe he'd lived too long with the past; maybe it was time to let it bury its dead and get on with living.

Lorraine had gone back to making the circles with her glass. "About that offer," she said.

Frank grinned suddenly. "I always did like frozen pizza."

Neither of them noticed the small man with "Forster" stitched above the breast pocket of his work jacket seated alone at the bar, but he watched them intently as they left. So intently in fact that the bartender had to rap twice sharply on the bar to ask him if he wanted another drink.

Pearson's new chief accountant reported the following Monday. He was a tall man with a flushed, fleshy face and the heavy-bellied body of an athlete who has ceased to exercise. It obviously wasn't because of any loss of energy or enthusi-

asm, however, because in those first weeks he was everywhere around the office, asking questions about everything and, more often than not, raising more in the minds of those he asked than he got answers for. It was a happy time for him, at least, and two months later he decided he was ready to make his move.

It was at the regular Thursday meeting in Pearson's conference room adjacent to his office on the top floor. Timing it well, Cunningham waited until the room was almost filled before slipping in to take his place at the end of the long table. As he sat down, he let his small eyes shuttle around the room, assessing the stir his entrance had made. Most of the faces turned toward him were merely curious, but Sanderson was frowning—upset, Cunningham realized, and beginning to burn, because no one had bothered to warn him in advance that one of his nominal subordinates had been invited to a meeting normally reserved for the top, top staff. Good, Cunningham thought silently. Angry men made mistakes, and although he was sure enough of his ground to know he didn't need it, he was still never one to pass up any advantage.

As the group came to order, Pearson down at the far end of the table cleared his throat. "I

think most of us are here now," he said. He was a slender man, mid-thirtyish, impeccably dressed in a gray suit and coordinated shirt and tie. "So why don't we get started. I asked Art Cunningham to sit in today because he has some recommendations for changes in the way we do business. They sound good; but since they impact on us all I thought I'd like to get your reaction before I made the final decision. Art."

Cunningham grinned inwardly, reflecting that the slight emphasis Pearson had put on "final" was signal enough to anyone perceptive enough to catch it that this was all eye-wash; the real decision had already been made.

"I realize I'm very much the new boy on the block," he said now, rising, "but I've been here long enough to have taken a good look around. And I'll tell you frankly that I was appalled by what I saw, because in just about every way that really matters we're still operating here in the office the same way we did when Mr. Pearson's father began the whole business. Now that'd be all right if it was still 1940 and there wasn't any better way of doing things. But it isn't and there is. Let me give you just one example. As you all know, because of the nature of the business we have to keep a fairly sizable contin-

gency reserve—not in actual cash, of course, but in short term notes and CD's. Fine. Great idea. The problem is keeping track of the rollover dates to insure we've always got sufficient actual cash to funnel out into the various project and operating accounts. Given the volume of business we do today, it's a mindblowing job. Similarly, the whole business of transferring funds from reserve to operations is based on a system of manual 'tickle's designed to alert somebody to take an action—again manually. Let that somebody miss a tickle and we're in trouble. Like I say, back in 1940 there wasn't any choice, but given the state of the art today we can now set it up so that funds are transferred automatically whenever the due date rolls around. We can even, if we find it maximizes interest, make it a self-actuating process whenever particular balances fall below set amounts. We can do it any damn way we please."

"With computers?" Edwards said.

Cunningham grinned. Edwards, a thin, balding man who headed the company's legal department, was a born straight man. "Scares you, does it?" he said. "Well, maybe it scares me, too, but it's the only way to go if we plan to stay on top. And we do plan to stay on top, don't we?"

"But at what cost?"

"Probably less than you think," Cunningham said. "The way the company's set up, we'd never come close to using the kind of system we'd want to full capacity, but shared time's ideal for us—at least until we've gotten our feet wet and really know how far we want to go. Basically, what that means is that we rent part of somebody else's computer. The disadvantage is that there's bound to be some 'hold' time while we wait for some other user to finish before we can access. But that's more than offset by the advantages—no large initial outlay and over the long haul no worries about maintenance or obsolescence. Or space. The terminal—all we'd have on site—won't take up much more space than a typewriter and we can put it anywhere there's a phone handy to plug in.

"Staffing's no problem either. The tab clerks are smart enough to realize their jobs are going. I've already got two of the brightest of them started on BASIC. It won't take long to bring them up to COBOL or one of the other business languages. In the meantime, according to her resume, Lorraine in Milt's office has worked with computers before. With her as backup for the transition period, we're all set to roll just as soon as the button is pushed.

On the assumption that it's going to be, I've already made a few preliminary contacts with Betatronics. They're a locally based firm although their main data bank is in K.C."

"Kansas City?"

Cunningham shrugged. "What's it matter as long as it's the end of a phone line? What counts is that they have a local service and maintenance capability." He paused, then added carefully: "The real advantage, though, is that their equipment is compatible with Mid-Continental Bank's, which gives us a tremendous potential for savings through direct tape-to-tape transactions."

Sanderson looked up sharply. "We bank with Ferris," he said. "We always have."

Deliberately, Cunningham let the silence drag out. Finally Pearson said, "We're transferring the accounts."

"All of them?" Sanderson cried out. "For God's sake, how am I supposed to explain that to Walt Michaels at Ferris?"

"Why explain anything?" Cunningham said. "It's our money and our business what we do with it."

"My money," Pearson corrected, "and my business." But his eyes never left Sanderson.

Afterwards, when the meeting had broken up, Sanderson found himself riding down alone

in the elevator with Edwards. He was still fuming, and finally his resentment spilled over. "They can think again," he said, "if they expect me to tell Walt Michaels we're pulling out after all these years. Let Junior do it. Or that smartass Cunningham."

Edwards looked at his friend pityingly. You'll do it, he thought. Pearson will see to that. Aloud he said: "Why do you put up with this crap, Milt? Why not take your pension and go while the going's good?"

Sanderson looked at him, truly bewildered. "Why," he said, "what would I do then?"

Cunningham, on the other hand, was in bubbling good spirits when he got back to his office. He had nothing personal against Sanderson. The man was simply obsolete, and the sooner he realized it the better for all concerned. In that connection, he felt the casual appropriation of the girl from the old fool's office had been a particularly inspired touch, even more telling in its way than the unannounced change of banks.

His good mood evaporated quickly, though, as he went through his mail, and finally he buzzed angrily for his secretary. "I thought I asked you to have that travel expense check ready for me when I got back."

"Yes, sir."

"Well?"

"I made up the check, Mr. Cunningham," the girl said, "and ran it through the machine. Now I'm just waiting for someone to unlock the box."

"What box?"

"The box on the checkwriting machine," the girl said. "It's always locked and I don't have a key."

"Who does?"

"I don't know. Mr. Owens usually handles pickup."

"Well, damn it, get him in here then."

"God damn it, Frank," he said when Owens came in, "why do I always have to find things out the hard way? Why didn't you just turn over the key to the checkwriter when I came?"

"Because I don't have a key," Frank said. "Nobody in the department does. It's a security measure," he added, at Cunningham's disbelieving look. "All the keys are kept in Sanderson's office. He'll send one of the girls down late in the afternoon just before mail dispatch to open up and make distribution."

Cunningham hesitated. Only a fool would ask Sanderson for a favor after what had happened in the meeting. But on the other hand he'd gone too far to appear to back down now.

"I've had enough of this nonsense," he said. "Come

with me."

Followed by Frank, he marched back to the supply room where the checkwriter was kept. It was a standard-model machine that could be set to perforate the amount across the face of a company check as well as print on it Pearson's authorized signature, then deposit the signed and completed check in a small locked box at one end. Cunningham examined the box briefly, then picked up a letter opener from one of the shelves nearby and inserted it in the crack between lid and box. On his second try he succeeded in springing the lock and popping the lid open.

There were three checks inside. Taking the one he wanted, he handed the other two to Frank. "See that these get where they belong," he said and left.

Frank continued to stand for a long time, holding the checks and looking down at the broken box. Finally he took a handful of blank checks from a box and ran them through the machine. They were valueless since there was no payee typed in under the perforations and Frank tore them up and dropped the pieces into a wastebasket. He just wanted somebody to notice that the counter on the machine disagreed with the register of checks written. But apparently no one ever did. At least it was

never questioned.

“Why do you have to fight him on every little thing?” Lorraine said.

“I’m not fighting him,” Frank said. “At least not on every little thing.”

“He thinks you are. So do a lot of other people.”

“That’s their problem,” Frank said. It was later that same day after the checkwriter incident and they were in Frank’s car, driving back to her apartment. It was Cunningham, of course, that Lorraine had meant. God knew who the others were. Probably most of the office, hoping he would take Cunningham on for them. “It’s just that there are reasons we do things the way we do. I think he ought to know them before he starts changing them.”

“Sure that’s all there is to it?”

Frank sighed. “I don’t know,” he said. “Maybe I do resent the son of a bitch. It’d be natural enough if I did. What would you have me do, anyway?”

Lorraine shrugged. “If it was me, I’d keep my mouth shut or pick up my marbles and go.”

“Then I’ll be a good boy and keep my mouth shut,” Frank said, “when I can. That make you happy?”

“I suppose it’ll have to,” Lorraine said. “It’s all I’m going to

get from you.”

Frank smiled. “You sound like a wife.”

Lorraine laughed shortly. “That’ll be the day.”

“Yes, it would,” Frank said seriously. He was silent a moment, then said: “I’m driving down to see Jim at his grandmother’s Saturday.” Jim was his son. “I’d like you to come along.”

“Inspection trip?” Lorraine said. She looked away. She had no doubt about who would be inspecting whom. “How long have you known me, Frank? Three months? Four at the most? Sure you really want to make that kind of commitment?”

“Nobody said anything about any commitment,” Frank said. “Just a trip downstate and maybe a picnic for three.”

No, Lorraine thought, of course no commitment, but that’s where it would lead anyway. Well, why not? Is what you’ve got what you want—a cold apartment and “relationships” that end up even colder until one day you’re cold yourself—cold inside and out—and only death to look forward to? “Ham or chicken salad?” she said. “For the sandwiches.”

“Ham.”

“That’s good,” she said, “Because I don’t know how to make chicken salad.”

Forster stood on the corner

hugging himself against the chill and shifting his weight nervously from foot to foot. He was a small man with a muddy-complexioned mashed potato face, and although he spent a good portion of his time waiting for one thing or another, he wasn't really very good at it, and he continued to fidget now until finally he spotted the man he was looking for. Gratefully he fell in step beside him.

"Remember Laurie?" he said. And from the sudden frown on the other's face, he saw he did indeed.

Saturday morning arrived faster than Lorraine had expected, and she stood in the middle of the small kitchen, staring in dismay at the array of food spread before her. It was just too much, she thought, but there was no way to back out. Resolutely she picked up the long kitchen knife and began to hack away at the ham. Afterwards she was to wonder what would have happened if she hadn't had the knife, if she had just given up in despair. But that was in the future. Now a sharp rap at the door brought her up out of her concentration. Frank, she thought. He must really be anxious to be so early. Well, wasn't she herself? In addition to food enough for an army hadn't she bought new jeans

and a man-tailored shirt, just for the occasion? And, still holding the knife, she went out to let him in.

Instead of Frank, though, a tall thin man with a pale, tight-skinned face and lank blondish hair that fell forward across his forehead grinned down at her. Reflexively she threw her weight against the door, but the tall man had anticipated the move and thrust his shoulder into the opening with enough force to hold her off and then, as her strength ebbed, send her staggering back into the room. He followed quickly, kicking the door shut behind him.

"Did you really think I wouldn't find you?" he said.

"Get out of here, Eddie," Lorraine said. "Leave me alone."

"When I'm finished," Eddie said. He drew a pair of rubber kitchen gloves from his pocket and began to pull them on. Lorraine's eyes flicked around the room, and when he lunged for her, she darted swiftly to one side. He'd anticipated again, though. His hand shot out, cuffing her across the face and knocking her back. Blindly she thrust out with the knife and felt it wrenched roughly from her grasp. Defenseless now, she cowered back, waiting for the next blow.

When it didn't come, she found the courage finally to open her eyes and look up. Eddie stood

before her, mouth open and gasping, the knife handle dark against the lighter shirt where the blade, impelled by his motion as much as hers, had thrust in deeply and up. As she watched aghast, his eyes glazed and he fell full length onto the floor.

Lorraine thrust her fist into her mouth and bit down hard to stifle the scream welling up in her throat. And stood like that until finally the intercom buzzer penetrated her consciousness and she managed to stagger over to it and press the button.

"Frank," she sobbed. "Oh, thank God, Frank."

Lorraine's voice had warned him this was no ordinary emergency and he took the stairs two at a time. Whatever it was he expected, though, it wasn't what he found. He stopped, appalled, just inside the doorway, but before his thoughts could crystallize, Lorraine was in his arms, sobbing hysterically.

"He broke in," she managed to say at last. "He tried—"

"It's all right," Frank said. He understood now, or thought he did. "It's over now and everything's going to be all right." She followed unresisting as he guided her into the bedroom and sat her down on the edge of the bed. "You stay here," he said. "I'll take care of everything."

She caught his arm as he started to rise. "Where are you going?"

"Just outside," Frank said, "to call the police."

"No!" Her face was grim and set, all trace of hysteria gone. "No. No police."

"Lorraine, I have to call them."

"No," she repeated. "No. Sit down, Frank. Listen to me. Please." Gingerly he sat on the bed beside her. "I knew him, Frank," she said, not looking at him. "His name was Eddie Duryea. He was my husband. I'm sorry, Frank, but I couldn't tell you before. I couldn't tell anybody. God knows I wanted to divorce him badly enough, but I didn't dare. I was too afraid." She turned back to him. "It's true what I told you, Frank. He did force his way in. He was going to kill me if he could."

Frank shook his head. "Then it doesn't matter," he said. "Husband or no, he still had no right—"

She put her hand up to his lips. "You don't understand, Frank. I married Eddie when I was seventeen, mainly I think because everybody told me I shouldn't and I was going to prove I knew better. And at the beginning it was good—or at least what I thought was good at the time—but then the bills started coming in and Eddie and one of his friends decided

to hold up a liquor store. I drove the car.

"It would be easy to say I didn't know what they were doing. But I did. I was young and wild and anyway what could go wrong? Nothing," she added bitterly, "except an off duty cop walking in for a six pack just as Eddie's friend pulled his gun. That was when the shooting started. And that was when I stopped being cool and smart and whatever else I thought I was and just floored the gas pedal and shot out of there like hell itself was after me. Maybe it was. Maybe it still is."

"That was a long time ago," Frank said. "They couldn't hold you for it now."

"You still don't understand, Frank. The cop died. So did Eddie's friend. That makes it murder and there's never any statute of limitations on that." She put her hand over his. "This isn't your problem, Frank. Go home. You just never came today. With a little luck it'll be a week at least before anybody finds him, and I can be a long way away by then."

"No," Frank said.

"There's no choice, Frank. It's got to be that way."

"No," Frank said again. He looked back toward the living room and the sprawled body. "He's the one who never came. None of this happened."

"You can't mean that!"

"Why not? Nobody's breaking the door down to get in and find out what happened. Get him out of here and what is there to connect him to you? Nothing. Is there?"

"No." She looked at him searchingly for a long moment. "Can we do it?" she said at last.

"Let's find out."

It was an easy decision to make, but, Frank reflected afterwards, a hard one to carry out. He'd seen movies, of course, where two people had carried dead bodies between them; pretending the corpse was merely drunk or sick. But that, he suspected, worked only in the movies. The alternative was to throw the body over his shoulder and trust to luck. He'd been up and down Lorraine's apartment stairs dozens of times in the past weeks without meeting a soul. Maybe he wouldn't again. But what would he do with the body when he got down to the street? Much better to wait until dark, but, frankly, the thought of spending the day cooped up with the body or, worse, someplace else never knowing whether the whole house of cards had collapsed or not was more than he could bear. There had to be an answer, though, and finally out of sheer nervous frustration he left the apartment and went downstairs to the basement in

search of one.

As he'd expected, it was a storage area, with wire mesh cages set aside for individual tenants' use. At the far end, though, a stocky balding man in faded blue coveralls was stacking lawn equipment. On sudden inspiration, Frank went up to him.

"I've been helping my fiancée pack up some stuff," he said. "I was wondering if you had any boxes we could use."

"How big?"

Frank made an indeterminate gesture with his hands. "Big as you've got."

"Well, you want a wardrobe or anything like that, you'll have to go to a movers, but I think there's an old china barrel around if that'll help."

It would, Frank said, and followed the man back to a small room near the furnace area from which he pulled out a flattened, heavy cardboard box roughly three and a half feet a side. "Don't look like much," the super said, "but you seal up that bottom and it'll hold a ton. New one'd cost you twenty-five or thirty dollars these days."

They settled on ten, and with mounting excitement Frank carried the box back upstairs. Lorraine watched curiously as he assembled it.

"You know," she said, "if this weren't so serious, it would be funny."

"We'll laugh later," Frank said. He finished crisscrossing the box bottom with fiberglass strapping tape as extra reinforcement, then set it upright and went over to Duryea's body.

It still lay where it had fallen, knife handle protruding from the chest. Frank steeled himself, then grasped the handle firmly and pulled the knife out—and sighed with relief when the great gush of blood he'd feared didn't materialize. Putting the knife aside, he grasped Duryea under the armpits and with Lorraine's help carried him over to the box.

It was a tighter fit than Frank had expected and the box bulged ominously where Duryea's knees pressed against it, but fortunately rigor hadn't set in yet and they were able to force the lid closed and seal it.

The work and strain had taken their toll, though, and it was a good twenty minutes before they could bring themselves to face the next part—carrying the box and its grisly contents down to Frank's car—but somehow between them they managed it. And then it was done. Or almost.

Frank drove west, keeping to the expressway until they were well clear of the city and its suburbs, then turning off onto a secondary road and following it deeper into the flat country-

side to a smaller feeder road that in turn led to an unpaved track. The track narrowed rapidly and grew rutted, but Frank pressed on until it made one last bend and ended abruptly in a grove of trees.

It was quiet here except for the pinging of the cooling engine, but the empty beer cans and other litter Frank spotted as he got out indicated the place wouldn't remain unvisited for long. Too bad, but he wasn't about to go looking for another. Not now. Not ever. And thinking that, he cut the twine he'd used to tie the trunk lid down and by sheer force hauled the box out and let it fall onto the ground.

Duryea had settled in even more tightly than before, and it took the two of them working together again to get him out. Paradoxically, the very difficulty of the work made it easier, allowing them to concentrate on the task at hand and ignore what it was they were handling. And as soon as he had his breath back, Frank caught Duryea by the ankles and dragged him deeper into the grove. He knelt briefly by the body to go through its pockets, then taking the keys and wallet he found, but leaving the loose change, went back to the car. The box, broken and crushed now as well as empty, fitted easily into the trunk, and with-

out even a second glance Frank backed out and around and headed back down the track. Shortly after they hit the secondary, he threw Duryea's keys as far as he could into one field, the wallet into another.

We got away with it, Lorraine told herself, but no matter how many times she repeated it, it wouldn't dissolve the small icy fear deep inside her that things were never that easy. But then a week passed and another. The flurry at the office when the terminal was installed helped, too, and it was all beginning to seem like the bad dream Frank said it was when she got the first call from the hoarse-voiced man who identified himself as a friend of Eddie's and said if she knew what was good for her she'd meet him in a little bar he knew off South Wabash.

Forster sat at the far end of the bar where it curved back to meet the wall, drumming his fingers on the polished surface and watching the room. He'd been there a good half hour now, and the strain was beginning to tell. He'd be all right, he told himself, once she came. *If* she came. Hell, she had to. No way she'd dare stay away. Unless—

He never finished the thought because he spotted her then,

coming in the door. Owens was with her, but that was all right because it told him something he'd only suspected before—that the two of them were in it together. And, in any case, something warned him as he watched them now that if push came to shove it would be the woman he would have to watch, not Owens. Maybe that had been Eddie's mistake—remembering her as the flaky kid she'd been and not realizing everybody changed. Maybe, maybe not. It was one, he told himself, he wouldn't make, anyway.

They were obviously trying to pick him out, but this was his party and to make sure they knew they were going to have to do it his way he waited until they were seated at one of the back booths, then slipped off his stool and ambled across the floor as if on his way back to the washroom. At the last minute he turned and slid quietly onto the bench opposite them.

"How's it going, Laurie?" he said. "Ah—sorry. It's Lorraine now, isn't it? It don't matter. You don't remember me anyway, do you, Laurie? I mean, Lorraine. Naw, no reason why you should. There was a whole bunch of us used to hang around together, but all you ever had eyes for was Eddie." He grinned at Owens. "You should have seen the two of them. They were really something."

"I remember you," Lorraine said flatly.

"Yeah? Really? How about that? You must not have seen me then that other time over in that place on Randolph. I saw you, though. Knew you in a flash."

"And ran right to tell Eddie."

Forster shrugged. "You know how it is," he said. "A guy does what he thinks is best for himself. Just like you did that time you ran off and left Eddie to take the heat. Of course, that's just water under the bridge now. Eddie sure don't care. According to the papers, he's dead. A couple of kids found him out in some woods someplace. Cops think he was dumped there." He looked up slyly. "That's the difference between me and the cops. I know he was."

"What is it you want?" Lorraine said.

"Just what I would have gotten from Eddie," Forster said, "A thousand dollars. You can't ask fairer than that."

Lorraine shook her head. "Eddie never would have given you a thousand dollars," she said. "Not just for telling him you'd seen me."

"How about for taking him to where you lived, watching him go in, and never seeing him come out. Think that isn't worth a thousand? Or would you rather I gave it to the cops for nothing?" He grinned. "You think

about that, Lorraine. I'll be over at the bar there. You just let me know what you decide." He slid out of the booth, then paused. "Only one thing. I'm not making any mistakes like Eddie did. Either one of you tries to leave this place before I do, I go right back to the phone—and you know who I'll be dialing."

After he had gone, Lorraine sat staring grim-faced across at the place where he had been. "I knew it wouldn't work," she said. "I should have just run when I had the chance."

"We could pay him," Frank said. "A thousand isn't that much."

She shook her head. "It wouldn't be the end. He'd bleed us white—and then sing to the police just for spite."

"Maybe not," Frank said. A plan had begun to form in his mind. Six months earlier it would have been unthinkable, but he'd learned a lot in those six months—among other things that loyalty unless it cut both ways wasn't worth a damn. "What do you do with the company's cancelled checks when they come back from the bank?"

"See what's still outstanding and then file them down. Why?"

"Nobody else looks at them?"

"No, why? What are you driving at, Frank?"

"You'll see," he said and half rose to beckon to Forster at the

bar. The man ambled over, carrying three bottles of beer. He placed one in front of each of them, then sat down, taking a pull at the third. "What's the word?" he said.

"The word is we pay," Frank said. "But it's a one time only payment. You're a nuisance, fella, but that's all. You say you saw Eddie go into an apartment building and never come out. But how long did you stick around afterwards? And how many doors are there to the building? Where were you standing that you could watch them all? What I'm saying is you may think you know something, but you can't prove a thing."

Forster shrugged. "So what?"

"So this," Frank said. "If you want your money, the first thing you do is open yourself a bank account. Properly, it should be a business account, but for that you need a tax number. So you make it look like one by picking a name that could be a business. Arthur Mills would be a good one. Or Vernon Steel."

Forster looked at him suspiciously. "Why would I want to do that?" he said.

"Because the money's coming in a nice, big company check," Frank said, "and the only way you're going to be able to cash it is to deposit it and then wait until it clears before drawing the money out."

Forster shook his head. "You do it then," he said. "All I want is the cash. What it takes to get it is your problem."

"Except that I'm making it yours," Frank said. "I want you involved—you personally—so that if anything ever goes wrong, then all the bank records, teller's identification, everything will point to you. That's my guarantee you never change your mind about going to the police because if you do and I fall, you fall, too."

Forster was silent for a long moment. Finally he said: "Got it all figured out, haven't you?"

"Just tell me the name you want the check made out to," Frank said.

Forster shrugged again. "What the hell," he said. "What was that you said—Vernon Steel? That's good enough, I guess."

"And where do I send it?"

"I'll call you after you get the check made out." He rose and stood beside the booth. "Just one thing you ought to remember, though, smart guy. Sometimes you can be too goddamned smart for your own good." Then he was gone.

For a long time afterwards Lorraine simply sat looking down at her hands. Finally she said: "What happens when they run an audit and find the books don't balance?"

"We'll worry about that when

it happens," Frank said. "Actually, there shouldn't be a problem because all I have to do is add a thousand of my own to the next deposit and the balance will always show exactly what it's supposed to. The only giveaway would be the check itself and nobody will question that if they never see it."

"A thousand of your own," Lorraine said. "You keep getting in deeper and deeper, don't you, Frank?"

"I don't mind," Frank said. "The money's nothing. It's insurance from when my wife died. I never wanted it. That's why I never spent it. So let it go for this now. Let the dead past wipe out the past."

Feeling more than a little pleased with himself, Forster followed the black-coated waiter up a short flight of stairs, then went on past him to rap sharply on the door the man indicated. It opened with disconcerting suddenness and a tall, narrow-shouldered man with a thin, sharp-nosed face and neat pencil line mustache looked out and regarded Forster unblinkingly. Forster took an involuntary step back. "They told me I was supposed to meet somebody here," he said.

"Come in, Mr. Forster," a voice boomed from inside the room, and Forster slipped in

around the thin man, who moved back just enough to let him enter.

The room was larger than he'd expected, with its own untended bar and a stove-like arrangement in one corner for keeping food warm. A grossly fat man sat at a small table set for one. "I was just finishing," he said. "Perhaps you'd care to join me for some coffee?"

Forster shook his head.

"As you wish," the fat man said. He nodded to his younger companion to clear the table, then let his bulk settle back comfortably in his chair. "My name is Grenville. My associate is Mr. Zachary. Our contacts tell us you've been asking around for assistance in cashing some checks you have."

"Yeah," Forster said. He'd have to pay, of course, and a stiff amount, too, but it would be worth it to show smart guy Owens and Lorraine that they didn't have a handle on the world, that in fact he had a handle on them he could twist any time he wanted. Now, as the fat man held out his hand, he fumbled the checks from his pocket and passed them over.

"Two checks," Grenville said appraisingly. "Five hundred dollars each. All right for a start, perhaps, but I assume the others will be in more reasonable amounts."

Forster hesitated. "I hadn't

really worked that out yet."

"You hadn't worked that out? Surely you didn't intend to stop with this?" He looked at the checks disparagingly. "You researched Pearson's, didn't you, Zachary? How much would you say we could reasonably expect to take out?"

"Five hundred thousand," Zachary said. "For openers."

"Surely your contact at the company must understand that," Grenville said. "Who is he anyway?"

Forster hesitated again, some instinct warning him not to give away more than he had to. But five hundred thousand. Just the thought of it was like a burning in his brain. "His name's Owens," he said finally. "He's some kind of a wheel in their accounting department." He hesitated one last time, then added: "He may not be that easy to deal with, though. What I mean is, he and I aren't exactly partners."

Grenville smiled faintly. "That's a situation we'll have to rectify," he said.

Two weeks later he sat in the restaurant off Market Square waiting to buy Frank a brandy.

II

Frank sat looking down at the photostats Grenville had placed before him. He found, curiously

enough, that he wasn't really surprised or shocked. The only surprising thing, in fact, was that he hadn't realized before that the fat man had to have them, that he would never have forced this meeting if he hadn't. It made it easier to view the whole affair dispassionately, almost clinically.

"What do you want?" he said.

"I should have thought that was obvious," Grenville said. "You have the ability to draw checks on your company. My associates and I have the means to cash them safely. Common sense suggests that it would benefit us both to pool our resources and split the profits. I realize, of course, that to the uninitiated a fifty-fifty split might seem unfair, but my associates and I would absorb all expenses and in any case I think you'll find it preferable to the arrangement you had with the unfortunate Mr. Forster."

"Unfortunate?"

Grenville smiled faintly. "I'm sorry," he said. "Of course, you couldn't know. Forster's dead." He shrugged. "I myself dislike violence, but some of my associates—well, he was a vicious little man and I doubt anyone will grieve him, least of all those of us seated at this table. I mentioned him at all only to emphasize that mine is indeed a mutually beneficial proposition. I must add, though, that

if you were to refuse, my associates might think it was because you wanted all the profit for yourself and that would upset them very much, particularly since they've already gone to the trouble of eliminating Forster for you. It would be difficult under those circumstances to dissuade them from sending these photocopies to your employer—at the least."

"You make yourself very clear," Frank said.

"It's best when one does, Mr. Owens," Grenville said. "I can understand, of course, how you might have some qualms about continuing. Once too often to the well and one's bound to be caught and all that sort of thing. I won't pretend that eventually the loss won't be discovered; we both know it will, but I think you'll find that there's a considerable difference between what people suspect and what the police can prove. In any case, if you must be hanged, it would be foolish to let it be done for a lamb when the sheep is there just waiting to be sheared." He took a crumpled envelope from his pocket and passed it over to Frank. "Take it, Mr. Owens," he said. "It's your five hundred dollars from our first joint venture. You'll also find an address to which you should direct future installments." Grenville smiled. "Don't let it wait too long."

"Will he do what he says?" Lorraine said. It was later that same day. They were in her apartment for the usual after work drink, and Frank had just told her about Grenville and his "proposal."

"Will he turn me in if I don't 'cooperate'? I've no doubt of it."

"No. I mean will he really give us half?"

Frank was silent a moment. It had never occurred to him to think of it that way before. "I suppose so," he said at last. "He knows Forster was blackmailing us. I assume he knows why. He didn't have to offer anything if he didn't want to."

"Then do it, Frank. Give him what he wants and take what you want as well."

"You can't mean that. For God's sake, Lorraine; these people *killed* Forster!"

"And what's that to us? There's no choice anyway. You could never explain those checks now—not without the whole mess coming out. And then it would have all been for nothing. Worse, in fact." She put her hands on his arms and looked at him beseechingly. "You did what you did for us, Frank," she said. "Do this for us, too. You wanted to wipe out the past. This is our chance. We can go someplace where nobody knows us—just the three of us—and make a new life. Start over."

"On stolen money?"

"If need be, yes," Lorraine said fiercely. "We've been through enough, Frank. Life owes us this."

Frank was silent a long time. Finally he said: "I can't do it alone. I'll need someone to work the computer."

"Just tell me what you want me to do."

There was nothing to it really—just a simple matter of plugging figures into an existing program to set up another continuing transfer of funds from reserve to operating accounts and then establishing a kill credit to wipe out any record of the transaction. It was so easy. Lorraine was surprised nobody had thought of it before.

The first Pearson check arrived at the accommodation address Grenville had given Frank eight days later. By the end of the second month, over forty thousand dollars' worth had been collected. It was time, Grenville decided, for Zachary to take his trip.

There was a mixup at the airport in Atlanta, and the car that was supposed to be waiting wasn't, which meant that Zachary had to go through the rigamarol of renting one. But everything else had gone off smoothly, and following Grenville's instructions he drove north and west on secondary

roads mostly, the forty thousand dollars in checks packed neatly in his suitcase along with the clothes he would need for the trip. Assuming that much each time, it would take at least twelve trips like this to pull out the half million Grenville had set as his goal. That was all right with Zachary, though, because he enjoyed travelling. It was the one time he found he could afford to let himself relax, and it was with a real sense of regret that he finally turned off at the town Grenville had pinpointed.

His experience of small southern towns was limited, but this one, he decided, was typical: one long main street with a courthouse at one end and the usual assortment of hardware stores and five and dimes jammed into the three or four blocks leading up to it, a square old fashioned stone bank built to look like a fortress on one corner and farther on, just beyond the main intersection, a more modern glass and brick structure that was also a bank. It was this latter building that interested Zachary most, and he gave it a quick survey as he drove past, then followed the same road on out past the outskirts to the town's only motel, where he registered as L. P. Adams of Cincinnati.

Once inside his room, he checked the phone to insure he

could get an outside line without going through a switchboard, then dialed the number Grenville had given him.

"Mr. Lockhart?" he said when he had his party. "My name's Johnson. A mutual friend suggested I talk to you about opening an account at your bank."

"Why, yes," the man at the other end said. "Always glad of new business. It's after hours now, of course. But why don't you just stop down tomorrow—"

"No," Zachary said.

"I beg your pardon?"

I'll bet you do, Zachary thought. "I said no," he said. "The point being that I don't intend to 'stop down' at your bank. I want you to 'stop up' by me. And if that's not your usual way of doing business, well, too bad. It isn't very usual either for a small town banker to run up a tab of over twenty-five grand at the casinos in Vegas and not pay up. At least I imagine there are a lot of people around this town who'd think it wasn't. It might upset them enough to make them take their money out of your bank and put it where they'll know it's safe. I'm at the motel, Mr. Lockhart," he added sternly. "Room 23, rear. I'll expect you here in half an hour." He put the phone down without giving the other a chance to reply.

It was closer to twenty min-

utes than half an hour when Lockhart arrived. He was a paunchy man in his fifties with a soft, round face that had just begun to go jowly. A sheen of perspiration covered it now as he went past Zachary into the motel room. Zachary kicked the door closed after him.

"I don't understand this," Lockhart said. "They told me in Las Vegas—"

"Not to worry," Zachary said. "That something would be worked out. Well, that's what I'm here for. To work something out. You play along with me and your debt gets paid off quickly and painlessly. All you have to do is clear some checks through your bank just like you would for any customer. The only difference is we do all our dealing away from the bank. Plus the fact that ten percent of whatever passes through the account goes to square your account in Vegas."

"And when the debt's paid?"

"Then the ten percent's yours. Tax free—unless you feel some compulsion to share the wealth with Uncle Sugar. Most of us don't."

The banker's tongue came out to wet his lips. "I'd need written authorization," he said, "to justify the withdrawals."

Zachary shrugged. "Write it up," he said, "and bring it out the next time you come. I'll see that it's signed." He tossed the

envelope containing the Pearson checks onto the bed. "There's your first deposit. When they've cleared, you bring the money to me here—in cash. I'll call and tell you when. Once we get the account going, I'll start calling you in advance so you'll be sure to have enough cash on hand and we can handle everything in one trip. There's just one other thing," he added as Lockhart bent to pick up the envelope. "If anybody ever asks what I look like, you're not very good at descriptions. That's the rest of the price for having your debt forgiven."

Grenville slid the envelope across the small restaurant table to Frank, seated opposite him. "Your share," he said. "I regret the delay, but you understand, of course, that these things take time to arrange. Arrange safely, that is."

"Of course," Frank said. He put the envelope unopened in his pocket.

"Not going to count it?"

Frank shook his head. "You wouldn't cheat me," he said. The truth was he really didn't care.

Grenville smiled faintly, almost as if he understood. "No," he said. "It would be against my interest as much as yours, and since we both understand that, can we agree to dispense with

these meetings? I doubt anyone will remark us, but great accidents result from small risks taken once too often. It would be much safer for both of us if I were simply to mail you a locker receipt which you could then redeem at your leisure. Or," he added slyly, "I can hold your share until you're ready for it."

Frank shook his head again. "I don't think I'd care to trust you that much," he said.

"Neither would I, Mr. Owens," Grenville said, laughing. "Neither would I."

There was a note on Frank's desk when he got back to the building, asking him to stop by Cunningham's office.

"You're a little late, aren't you?" Cunningham said.

"I was late leaving."

"Oh? Well, it's not important, I just wanted to tell you I had occasion to mention the change in your attitude to Mr. Pearson the other day."

Frank stiffened.

"You don't argue any more, Frank," Cunningham went on, "and that's smart. I don't have to tell you there're going to be some changes around here. Perhaps sooner than you think, and when the dust settles, I don't intend to be sitting in this office. Play your cards right and you could be."

If he had dared when he got

back to his desk, Frank would have put his face down in his hands and cried.

Lorraine noticed the change in Frank, too. It was just nerves, she told herself.

He'd be all right once this was finished and he saw what the money meant to them. Just let it be finished soon, she prayed fervently, before something terrible happened. Half a continent away a small town banker was repeating the same prayer.

Lockhart had quickly found that it was impossible to keep his strange arrangement with respect to the Pearson checks secret from the others in the bank. And the odd looks he'd been getting around town lately told him that what those in the bank knew, others did, too. The fact that no one had approached him directly about it only confirmed that they realized as well there was something shady about it and that it was only a matter of time before something overt was done. And so now as he pulled into the darkened bank lot, parking as close to the door as he could and scurrying over to rap sharply on the shuttered glass, he made a silent vow to himself. This was his fourth such trip. Three more at the most and his debt would be paid off. And then, tax free money or not, he was quitting. Let Johnson or whatever his

name really was find somebody else to play his dirty game—or come in to the bank like any decent person.

The edge of one of the blinds lifted, fell back in place, and the sound of locks turning came from within. A moment later the door opened. "Didn't realize it was you, Mr. Lockhart," the night guard said. He smiled slyly. "Forget something again?"

Lockhart bit back the retort that sprang to his lips. "That's right, Carl," he said. "No, you might as well stay there. I'll only be a minute."

Aware that the man was still watching him, Lockhart hurried back to his office, got the packet of money he had made up earlier that day from his personal safe, and put in his briefcase. Almost as an afterthought he slipped the small pistol he kept beside it in his pocket, relocked the safe, and left as quickly as he had come.

He didn't become aware of the car following him until he was out of town, heading up to the motel, and its lights showed up blindingly in his mirror. Instinctively, Lockhart edged to the right to let the other pass, but the car continued to hang on his rear, tailgating now.

Idiot, Lockhart thought and resumed speed. The lights behind dropped back momentarily, then caught up again. Lockhart began to sweat, real-

izing that the other was pushing him now, forcing him to go faster and faster. In his desperation he didn't remember the curve at the base of the hill in front of him until he felt his wheels leave the road.

For one sickening instant he was flying; then the car jolted suddenly and jarringly to a stop and canted forward onto its side.

It took Lockhart several seconds to register that he was unhurt. Then, furious, he scrambled out. "You idiot!" he shouted. "You—"

He broke off. Two men were running down toward him from the other car, carrying what looked like long slender rods, and with a sudden start of fear Lockhart realized just how dark and lonely this stretch of road was. Without really thinking what he was doing, he pulled the gun from his pocket.

The tire iron smashed viciously down on his wrist. He screamed, dropped the gun and doubled forward in agony so that the second blow, aimed at the same spot as the first, caught him squarely across the base of the skull.

Zachary heard the sirens from his room at the motel, but he didn't really begin to worry until Lockhart was over an hour late. The man could have been held up by the lights and activity obviously taking place down

at the foot of the hill but not this long, and finally Zachary dialed his home. The voice that answered was obviously a maid's and on impulse Zachary asked if Mrs. Lockhart was there.

"No, sir," the soft voice said. "She gone with the police."

Zachary put the phone down. He had barely unpacked and now he crammed what little he had taken out into his suitcase, threw the bag in his car, and drove off.

He was fifty miles away before he remembered that he hadn't paid for the room. Too bad, but it wasn't likely, he decided, he'd ever be going back.

Three days later a Lieutenant Richard Millet of the Georgia state police phoned Pearson's long distance to ask for Vernon Steel's address since, he explained, a man thought to be connected with them was wanted for questioning in connection with the robbery-murder of a local banker. He wasn't really surprised when Cunningham told him the company had no record of any dealings with any such firm. Why, he asked, did the lieutenant think they might have? He was appalled when the lieutenant told him.

"A pity," Grenville said, "but everything ends eventually."

Zachary shrugged. They were in Grenville's office—or what passed for his office because the loft room was unfurnished except for the desk at which Grenville sat and there were no signs that the place was ever used except for these meetings. "Lockhart must have talked too much," he said.

"Or given himself away in some other way. These things happen. It's unfortunate, though, that you called attention to yourself at the motel that night. Otherwise they might never have drawn the connection."

Zachary shrugged again. "So what?" he said. "All it got them was a phony name and the address of a vacant lot somewhere."

"Unfortunately, I'm afraid they have a little more than that," Grenville said. "According to Atlanta, they've managed to trace you through the car rental agency. Apparently you were foolish enough to use your own I.D."

"Only the first time," Zachary said, "because I didn't have anything else. And it wasn't my foul-up either. There was supposed to be a car waiting, remember, and there wasn't."

"Water over the dam now," Grenville said. "Under the circumstances, though, it would be wise to take yourself out of circulation for a while. Tahoe

would be nice this time of year. Or the Springs. Either place you'd be among friends."

Zachary hesitated. "Yeah," he said slowly. "I suppose I could do that."

"Just give me a call when you're settled and let me know where you are."

"Sure," Zachary said. He continued to stand for another fraction of a minute, then when the fat man continued to ignore him turned on his heel and went out.

As soon as he heard the door close, Grenville's face lost its look of bland indifference. Moving with uncharacteristic briskness, he pulled the phone over and punched out a number. "This is G," he said when he had his party. "I'm afraid it's as we thought. . . . No, but he could become a liability. . . . I know. It is a pity, but better safe than sorry. . . . Yes, Tahoe or Palm Springs. He shouldn't be hard to find."

A board creaked at the far end of the room. Grenville looked up sharply. Zachary stood just inside the doorway, holding a silenced automatic in his tight right hand. "You bastard," he said. "You'd sell me, too, wouldn't you?"

Grenville raised his hand placatingly; but before he could speak the pistol sputted twice. The fat man's head jerked as the bullets struck. He stared

uncomprehendingly at the blood staining his shirt, then slumped sideways, carrying the chair and phone over with him. Zachary shot him four more times, then thrust the empty gun into his waistband and scrambled over to the body to pry the phone loose, but the line was already dead. Zachary threw the phone down at Grenville, then kicked the body twice before leaving. Grenville didn't feel it, but it made Zachary feel better anyway. Actually he was in no worse trouble than he had been before. The only question was whether it was safe to pick up the cash he had stashed in his apartment. It took time even for Grenville's playmates to get organized, but he decided not to chance it all the same. There was no point to it, not when there was so much more just waiting to be taken.

Lorraine could hear the phone ringing through the walls as she came up the stairs, and it continued to ring insistently as, hampered by the two bulky grocery bags, she fumbled trying to get her key into the lock. She wasn't even aware of the man behind her until his hand closed over hers.

"Here, let me get that."

She looked up, startled, but before she could really react the man already had the door open

and was stepping back, smiling. The smile died, though, as soon as her back was to him, and without warning he shoved viciously between her shoulders. Caught off guard, Lorraine lurched forward into the room, stumbled, and landed sprawling amidst the scattered groceries. Zachary followed swiftly, kicking the door closed behind him and covering her with the gun.

"Don't do anything foolish, Lorraine," he said. "All I want is the money. Give me that and there's no reason for anybody to get hurt."

Lorraine looked up at him from the floor, still too shocked to be terrified. The phone continued to ring. Zachary gestured with the gun. "Go ahead," he said. "Answer it."

Obediently she rose and went to pick up the phone. After a moment she put it back down. "There's no one there."

"Well, surprise, surprise," Zachary said. It had been his call, of course, placed from a corner phone booth when he'd seen her struggling to open the outer door, with the phone left carefully dangling from its cord once the connection was made so that her attention would be distracted as he followed her up. "Now, where's the money?"

Lorraine's eyes shifted. "In my purse," she said. "There isn't much . . ."

Zachary shook his head. "You know better than that," he said. "I mean the real money. The Pearson money. Where is it?"

When she didn't answer, he burst out: "Get it through your head, baby, the game's over now, and if you end up short, that's your tough luck. There are a lot worse things that can happen to you, and if you screw around with me you might just find out what they are."

"That wouldn't get you the money."

"Maybe not, but see what it gets you. I mean it, honey. I've got nothing to lose—from the cops or the mob. So you take your pick."

Lorraine looked away. "I don't have it," she said. "I kept out five thousand as a fallback in case things went wrong. That's all. Frank's got the rest."

"Where?"

"In a safety deposit box. Only he can get to it."

Zachary lowered the pistol. "Really trusted you, didn't he?" he said.

"It was so I wouldn't be involved," Lorraine said. She felt as drained as if she'd run a mile, and she hated herself for her fear, the way it was making her behave. "So no one could identify me."

"I should have guessed," Zachary said. "Well, let's hope Sir Galahad still feels protective. Call him."

"He's in Freeport with his son."

"There are phones there. Call him."

Despite the time the long drive back to the city gave him for reflection, it never occurred to Frank to doubt the threat was real—the man he had spoken to after the phone had been taken away from Lorraine had known too much not to have been one of Grenville's people, and treachery, he told himself, was what he should have expected. It wasn't until he was in the small private room beside the bank vault, though, that he realized he didn't really care. The money didn't really mean anything to him. It was just so many bits and pieces of colored paper he and Lorraine had agreed almost reflexively that they didn't dare spend until long after the hubbub and suspicion had died. The truth was he would never have spent it. He hadn't taken it for reward or advantage and only in part in response to Grenville's veiled threats. What it had really been was a means of lashing out at a system he felt had cheated him. And inevitably, of course, the wrong people had been hurt.

Well, it was over now. Grenville's man could have the money and all the luck Frank hoped it brought him.

Quickly he finished his task and took the empty deposit box back outside for the teller to put in its slot. It would sit there empty until the time came to renew and then he would simply let the lease lapse. By then, of course, he and Lorraine and Jim would have long since resumed living the way people were meant to live.

Assuming, he realized with a sudden chill, that option was left to them. And after he left the bank he sat for a long time in his car, thinking about it.

At the same time across town, Zachary sat in the big armchair, gun held loosely in his lap, watching Lorraine pace back and forth. She must not be a smoker, he decided. Otherwise, she'd have gone through a good two packs by now. Sooner or later, though, restless as she was, something was going to have to give, and he wondered idly just what form it would take.

As if sensing his thoughts, Lorraine stopped almost in mid stride and turned abruptly. "Would you like some coffee?"

Zachary shook his head.

"Well, do you mind if I make some for myself?"

Zachary shook his head again, and she turned as abruptly as before to go back into the kitchen. After a moment he rose and went to stand in the doorway to watch her. She had

put a pan of water on the stove and, when it came to a boil, poured some into a cup, added powder, and stirred. Without looking around, she said: "There's plenty. Sure you won't have some?"

Zachary grinned. "Nice try," he said, "but no cigar. That's not to say a different time, a different place I wouldn't be tempted. The problem is, right now where I'm going one can make it, two can't. And I'm the one. Not you."

Lorraine's lips tightened and Zachary realized that if she had been close enough she would have thrown the scalding coffee at him, gun or no. His grin broadened. "I wonder what your boyfriend would think if he knew what you were really like."

"He knows me," Lorraine said.

"Does he? I wonder if you even know yourself."

She opened her mouth to retort, but the phone's quick trill froze them both. Then Zachary stepped back into the living room and motioned with the gun for her to take the call.

"Yes?" Lorraine listened for a moment, then lowered the receiver. "It's Frank," she said. "He wants to talk to you."

Zachary hesitated, then backed her away with the gun and took the phone. "What's keeping you, Owens?" he said. "I'm getting very nervous and

impatient. So's your girlfriend."

"I thought you might be," Frank said. "That's why I called. So there won't be any nasty surprises. I'll be there in fifteen minutes. I won't have the money with me. That's my insurance you don't decide it would be easier to take it off a dead man."

"Smart, aren't you?" Zachary said.

"I've had good teachers," Frank said. He hung up.

Zachary put the phone down and looked sourly back over at Lorraine. "Get your coat," he said.

"What for?"

"What do you think for? We're going out." He smiled grimly. "Your boyfriend thinks he's smart. We're going to show him other people are smarter. Now move."

Lorraine held his eyes for a long moment, then got the coat and let herself be half shoved, half guided out to a gray sedan parked three or four carlengths back from the apartment entrance, obediently sliding in and over to the far left rear as Zachary dictated. As soon as she was settled, he got in himself, in front, sitting half turned on the seat so he could watch both her and the street and holding the gun low in his lap out of sight. Lorraine held her body tense, watching him. More and more, it seemed, his atten-

tion was directed out toward the street. Tentatively she moved an arm, then, as his eyes flicked instantly back, calmly folded her hands in her lap. Zachary smiled faintly. Then the smile faded and his eyes swivelled swiftly back to the street as he spotted Frank parking across from the apartment entrance. He was alone and, as promised, empty handed. Sourly, Zachary leaned forward to press the horn button twice, then moved back quickly, motioning Frank to approach from the driver's side, away from him.

"All right," he said, "here we are just like you wanted, out in front of God and everybody. Now it's your turn. Where's the money?"

"I'll take you to it."

"All right," Zachary said. He motioned with the gun. "Get in. You drive."

Frank didn't move. "Just the two of us," he said. "You and me."

Zachary smiled cynically and shook his head. "Not a chance, fella," he said. "All of us go. That's my insurance you haven't decided to play it even cuter than you said."

"And afterwards?"

"One step at a time," Zachary said. "You worry about afterwards when it gets here. Right now you just think about what'll happen if you say no."

For a long moment nobody moved. Then finally Frank opened the driver's door and got in. Zachary tossed him the keys and, as Frank started the motor, let himself settle back on the seat. In a way he was glad Owens had tried to pull the cute stuff. Having learned he couldn't get away with it, he should be just that much easier to deal with from now on. If he wasn't—well, it didn't really matter. There'd never been any question of letting them live anyway—if for no other reason than to deny Grenville's friends whatever slight lead knowing he had the money might give them.

Suddenly, Zachary tensed again. They had turned off into the main feeder leading to the expressway, and in the traffic a police car had pulled up and was cruising beside them. Owens' eyes kept flicking over toward it.

"Don't even think about it," Zachary said.

Nodding, Frank slowed, then braked carefully for the light ahead while the cruiser flashed through on the yellow. Out of the corner of his eye he caught Zachary's matching nod of approval. As the light changed back, he let the car begin to roll forward, then suddenly without warning floored the gas pedal. He was aware of Zachary's startled shout, but before the gun-

man could react further, he slammed down hard on the brakes, at the same time twisting the wheel sharply left.

Caught unbraced, Zachary was hurled forward into the dash. Long cracks starred out across the windshield as his head struck the glass, and as he rebounded back against the seat, Frank grabbed quickly to wrest the gun from his unresisting grasp.

"Finish it," Lorraine screamed. "Do it. Kill him now while you've got the chance."

Reflexively, Frank raised the gun, then after what seemed an eternity lowered it again unfired.

"No," he said.

"Give it to me then. Let me do it."

"No!" He pulled the gun away from her reaching hand. Behind them horns blared and a siren wailed its ever nearing rise and fall. Lorraine looked at him, appalled, then turned abruptly to jerk the lock button up and thrust the door open. Frank put his hand out to stop her.

"Don't," he said. "Run and it just goes on and on. It never

ends. It just gets worse. And I can't live like that." He shook his head. "I'm sorry, Lorraine, but I can't be what I'm not. God knows I tried, but I just can't."

His eyes held hers until finally she looked away. "I'm sorry, too," she said, and he could see the glistening in the corner of her eye where the tears had begun to well out. "I'll be sorry all my life, but I can't be what I'm not, either. I don't even have the strength to try."

She pushed blindly out of the car and fled. The last he saw of her she'd reached the far sidewalk and was running down between the high buildings, her coat bellowing out behind her. It wasn't the memory he'd wanted, but it was the one, he knew, that he would keep. And in time he would come to terms with that, just as he would come to terms with whatever else it took to end this now. Because without an ending there could be no hope of a new beginning.

Outside, the sirens rose to a crescendo, then died. And holding the gun carefully by the barrel to show he was harmless, Frank got out to wait for the police already running up.

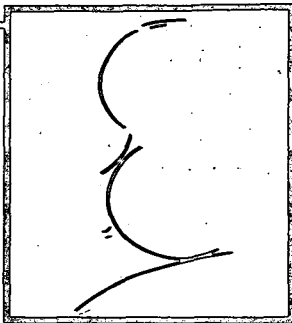


Rudolf Nureyev and Nastassia Kinski in *Exposed*.

© 1983 United Artists Corporation.

MURDER BY DIRECTION

by Peter Shaw



After watching the ballet dancer, Rudolf Nureyev, and the ingenue actress, Nastassia Kinski, knock out a cell of international terrorists in *Exposed*, you have to wonder why Interpol, Mossad, and other police organizations seem to have so much trouble doing the same thing. Nureyev and Kinski don't even go at the job full time. He is a concert violinist who is kept busy practicing and performing. She is a top fashion model who must spend endless hours in front of the cameras.

A good deal of other business has to be got out of the way as well before the hunt for the terrorists can begin. It takes a boring lecture in English class to convince Nastassia that she should break off her affair with the professor, leave college, and

move to the big city. Here she must undergo the hard knocks and humiliations of a working class girl before she can be discovered and made a model. Falling in love with Nureyev isn't as easy as one might suppose, either. He pursues Nastassia much in the manner of a New York City subway and street corner pervert, following her, leering briefly, and then disappearing. One has the distinct feeling that she succumbs to him only because the script demands it.

Eventually Nastassia becomes fascinated with Nureyev's obsessive, self-appointed mission to wipe out terrorists. She follows him to Paris with the idea of helping out, then suddenly decides to search for the terrorists by herself. As always seems to be the case with

amateur movie detectives, all the clues fall perfectly into place, so that it is not long before Nastassia finds herself in the terrorist hideout. Here she is subjected to yet another boring lecture, this time from Harvey Keitel, the group's leader. Somehow, though, the terrorist puts us off less than the college professor did.

Here we arrive at the central problem of what may be termed the well-meaning anti-terrorist movie. *Exposed* goes out of its way to make the pursuit of the terrorists both morally justified and romantic. But the movie never succeeds in making us root wholeheartedly for the good guys. There will always be something romantic and fascinating about the dedication of an underground movement. In this instance, for example, the group's loft hideout photographs far more interestingly than Nastassia's chic pad back in New York. As a result, no matter where an audience's real sympathies may lie, the terrorists, contrary to the filmmaker's intentions, command by far the greatest interest.

The Draughtsman's Contract is an English country house mystery with a setting both familiar and strange. Instead of the Victorian or Edwardian England of most period mysteries, this one is placed at the end

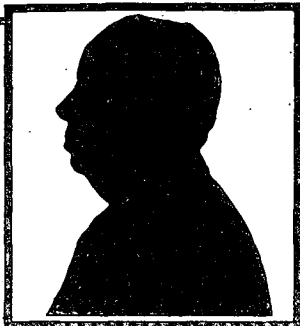
of the seventeenth century. We find ourselves outside a great country estate. Fantastically bewigged English aristocrats with painted faces promenade up and back in the formal gardens. They are speaking in measured tones that sound almost like another language. A painter has been hired to draw a dozen views of the estate, and a good part of the movie consists in following him about his task.

Each of his drawings contains a clue. But since it is not till half way through the action that a murder is announced, these clues are hard to put together and keep in mind. In the meantime other intrigues are developing, and these eventually result in another murder. What makes the mysteries particularly difficult to solve is the movie's fidelity to seventeenth century human behavior and motives.

Perhaps only the most serious puzzle solvers and students of history will want to see the whole film. Even they, I suspect, will have to see the movie twice before being able to sort out its mysteries. But whoever goes to this unusual excursion into the past will be rewarded with an exceptional experience. The viewer will have stepped back into time and been given the feeling that this is the way life really was.

FRAMES OF REFERENCE

by Peter Christian



GK. Chesterton's wise Father Brown, while not sparking an overwhelming tradition of priest-detectives in mystery movies, has managed several times to minister to the screen. He was portrayed first in the thirties by rotund Walter Connolly—who in the same period played Nero Wolfe as well. More remembered—although rarely seen today—is Alec Guinness's interpretation of him in *The Detective*, a thoughtful, skilled weaving of several Chesterton stories into a feature narrative. It focuses mainly, however—as did the Connolly film—on "The Blue Cross," the Mystery Classic in this issue of AHMM. (Paul Lukas and Peter Finch, respectively, portrayed the adversary, Flambeau.) Since that time Father Brown has appeared in German features and British television (the Kenneth More series brought to this country by PBS' *Mystery!*). In recent years, however, Father Brown was the subject of an NBC television pilot called *Sanctuary of Fear*, in which he was transplanted to an American parish. Barnard Hughes, best known for Irish character parts, is a priest attached to a crumbling inner-city church (filmed at New York's venerable St. Malachy's, the "Actor's Chapel") who solves a non-Chesterton murder case with quiet wisdom.

Priests have not made frequent appearances in other mystery movies. Sometimes they are suspects. Perry Mason is puzzled by a cleric's speech impediment in *The Case of the Stuttering Bishop*—how could the man ever be eloquent from the pulpit? Sometimes they are murder victims. A priest is killed in the be-

ginning of Elia Kazan's grim semi-documentary, *Boomerang*, based on an actual case in which an attorney fights to exonerate a vagrant falsely accused of the death by an angry town.

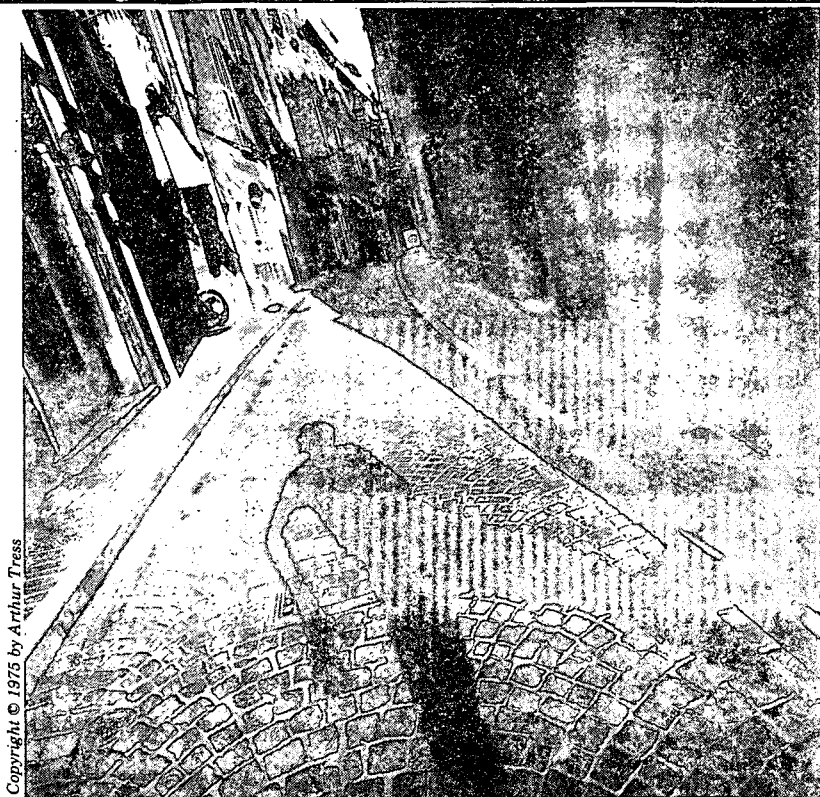
Most often, though, they are noble bystanders in crime and prison dramas. In *Angels with Dirty Faces*, Pat O'Brien and James Cagney play tenement youths whose lives take different paths, one to the altar and the other to the electric chair. But in the telefeature *Sarge* (subtitled *The Badge or the Cross*) priest and police unite in a single hero: distraught George Kennedy, a cop whose wife is murdered on their wedding night, leaves the force and is soon ordained, to walk his old beat as a law-and-order cleric.

Occult mysteries have specialized in priest protagonists, who after all have the special insights and weaponry to unravel dark evil. Often they are themselves destroyed, as are the troubled priests coping with a possessed girl in *The Exorcist* and the child antichrist in *The Omen*. By the second sequel to the latter film, seven monks are conspiring to rid the world of the now-grown-up fiend; the last one alive finally manages to do so. And John Carradine, a blind priest, guards the entrance to hell in *The Sentinel*.

But the most fascinating aspect of priest mysteries on the screen revolves around the seal of the confessional: what happens when a murderer reveals himself to a priest in confession, wherein all sins are to remain secret? Alfred Hitchcock used this situation in *I Confess*—Montreal priest Montgomery Clift is himself accused of a murder about which only he and the killer know the true facts; and he is powerless to speak. The device had already been used twice in the thirties: in both *Full Confession* and *Thou Shalt Not Kill* priests must stand helplessly by as men they know to be innocent are convicted of murder—until each convinces the real killers to confess to the police as well. And murder occurs in a confessional box in *The Last of Sheila*.

By far the most bizarre use of the confessional motif, however, is in a strange British film not yet released in this country, Anthony Shaffer's *Absolution*. The author of the brilliant *Sleuth* again presents us with a twisty, essentially two-character drama: a troubled priest (Richard Burton) at an exclusive boys' school hears in confession that a young student has experimented with murder, burying the body in a nearby wood. At night, the distraught priest searches for it—and digs up a decayed, carved pumpkin-face. The student returns to the confessional again and again, taunting him over his vow of silence, threatening to kill again: a local girl, a cripple. The ending, although guessable, is still startling.

THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



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Hunting—or escaping? And what fell purpose is afoot? We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, N.Y., N.Y. 10017.

The winning entry for the March Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 160.

UNSOLVED

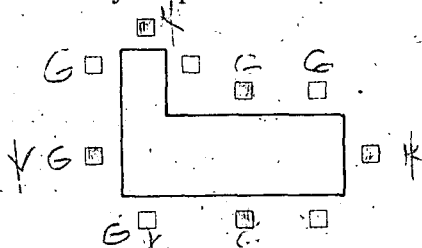
by
George J. Summers

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the September issue.

Abel and his wife, Babe, gave a party to which they invited four married couples. The four men invited were: Cain, Ezra, Gene, and Ivan. The four women invited were: Dido, Fifi, Hera, and Joan.

While they were all seated at the table, one person stood up, produced a gun, and killed another person. The chairs were arranged around the oddly shaped table as in the diagram below:



1. The people sat in alphabetical order going around the table clockwise.
2. The killer and the victim sat across the table from one another in the two newest chairs.
3. The killer's spouse and the victim's spouse sat across the table from one another in the two oldest chairs.
4. The only married couple to sit next to each other were the host and hostess.
5. The victim did not sit next to the killer's spouse.
6. The host sat alone at one side of the table.
7. The killer did not sit alone at one side of the table.
8. Both the killer and the victim were guests.

Which one of the ten was the killer?

"The L-Shaped Table," taken from New Puzzles in Logical Deduction by George J. Summers, copyright © 1968 by George J. Summers, Dover Publications, Inc., N.Y., N.Y.

See page 155 for the solution to the July puzzle.

FICTION

To Sleep, Perchance to Dream

by
Mel
Washburn



Illustration by Ray Lago

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The dinner had been just awful—the roast burnt black, the vegetables boiled to mush—and Oliver Evans had not been gracious. After each inedible course he had mocked his wife's culinary efforts and confided to his two guests that she had never been able to cook worth a damn. "Better throw this one back into the pot for another hour, Mary." He held up a limp and yellow carrot. "I think it's got some life in it yet." He winked broadly at his guests.

"Hee-hee-hee," cackled the little professor. "No zuch dink as 'zome life,' hey vot? Either you got it or you don't. Hee-hee. Am I right, doctor?"

Victor Marx smiled politely but said nothing. Life and death were his professional concerns. He didn't joke about them over dinner.

Mary Evans blushed. "I guess the dinner wasn't so good, huh Ollie?"

"It was pitiful, my dear. Just dreadful. But . . ." He leaned across the table and kissed her wetly on the cheek. "We all know you did your best, pathetic as it was, and we forgive you." He burped uncomfortably. "Agh, that taste! Reminds me of the gastric disorders we used to suffer at the old fraternity house. Remember the slop Cookie used to dish-up, Victor?"

"Indeed I do, Oliver. And I remember the time you put the soap chips in her beef stew. Foamed all over the kitchen."

Oliver laughed loudly. "The guys were awfully unhappy with me, until they saw the caterers arriving with steaks and ice cream."

"You always did things in a grand way, Oliver."

"In those days I had access to the old man's millions. But now, with the terms of his will . . ." He shrugged. "I can't afford to waste even soap chips."

"Zo charmink, dese reminiscences," said the professor. "I gould listen to dem by the hour."

"Yeah, I bet." Oliver wiped his face impatiently with his napkin. "Well, so much for the main course. Let's repair to the living room for coffee."

"Oh my gosh!" Mary jumped to her feet. "I forgot to brew the coffee."

"Blease, dear lady, allow me." The professor rose from his chair. "I consider myself somethink of an expert in the *Kaffee* line."

"Oh, no, I . . ."

"Come on, Mary," said her husband. "Let the professor fix the coffee. He certainly can't do any worse than you would." He smiled

at the professor. "Can you boil water without scorching it?"

"I dink zo. Hee-hee."

"Well then, you're a four-star chef compared to the little frau here. Go and fix the coffee."

"Your servant." The professor, surprisingly quick for a grey-haired hunchback, was already limping into the kitchen. Oliver, his wife, and his old college friend went into the living room and sat down. "Cripes!" screeched Oliver when the springs of his old chair poked him in the bottom. "We've got to replace this thing, Mary."

"Oh gosh, Ollie, we can't afford . . ." Her husband scowled. "That is . . ." She sank into an embarrassed silence.

"Not polite to discuss our financial affairs before guests, my dear." Oliver laughed bitterly. "Not that this dump leaves much to the imagination." He looked contemptuously around at the ragged carpet, the peeling wallpaper, the shabby furniture. "Hard to believe, isn't it, Vic, that even as we sit here there's over a million of my dad's hard-earned bucks sitting in the bank, and I can't get a penny of it."

"Someday we'll have a child, Ollie . . ." his wife began softly.

"Not likely. Been trying for seventeen years, my sweet. And now dashing young Evans, the pride of fraternity row, is fat, balding Ollie with a crummy job, a dumpy little house, and the family fortune locked up in trust funds, reserved for the children who will never come."

"And with a wife who adores him," Mary added.

Oliver smiled wryly.

"Yeah, that too."

"Here is the *Kaffee!*" announced the professor cheerily, carrying a tray laden with four cups. "Here is for the hostess . . . here is for the doctor . . . here is for the host." He handed one to each person. "I fix it the special way we have in Vienna. Hope you like!" He lifted his own cup and sipped noisily. "Aha! Chust perfect! You may not like at first, but you must give a chance. Drink to the bottom, then decide your opinion."

Vic raised the cup to his lips, but the odor alone made him flinch: a faint stench like burnt rubber. What awful muck, he thought, but then he noticed the professor watching him brightly, so he put the cup to his lips and drank. The stuff was as thick as used motor oil and almost as tasty, but the professor, whom Vic had met for the first time that night, seemed innocent (though eccentric) and eager to please. So Vic forced himself to drain his cup.

"You like? Or not?" the professor asked him with a quizzical smile.

"Very unusual flavor. Almost unique."

The professor beamed. "You like?" he asked Mary.

"Well, I . . ." she faltered. "It tastes awful strong."

"Yes, strong. But you like?"

"Oh . . . oh, yes."

"Then you drink? Must drink to the bottom."

"Go on and drink it, Mary," urged her husband.

"All right, certainly." She emptied her cup.

"Ach zo! Excellent!" The professor seemed delighted: his coffee was a success.

"So you're from Vienna originally?" Vic asked him conversationally.

"No, not originally. I study there many years. Before that, as a boy, I am in the Carpathian Mountains. You know where that is?"

"I think so. Sort of in Russia, isn't it?"

"Hee-hee-hee. Sort of. Anyway, was a very nice place to grow up and go away from. I like better here."

"OH! Oh dear me!" Mary cried out.

"I upset you, dear lady?" The professor looked at her searchingly.

"No, it's just that I . . ." She looked suddenly pale and frightened. Her face gleamed with perspiration. "I . . ." She slipped off the sofa and slumped to the floor.

"Dear lady!" The professor knelt swiftly beside her.

"Mary! Mary?" exclaimed Oliver Evans, and Victor Marx rushed out of the house to get the black bag from his car. But when he came back in, Mary Evans lay flat on the floor, and the two other men were standing above her, looking solemn.

"How is she?" Vic asked.

The professor replied, "You examine and tell us, please, herr doctor." He and Oliver stepped aside, allowing Vic to kneel beside the prostrate woman.

"She isn't breathing," he said. He palpated her carotid artery. "She doesn't have a pulse, either."

"Are you sure?" the professor asked in a curiously dry tone.

"Yes, please make sure, Vic," said Oliver.

Vic took the stethoscope from his black bag, unbuttoned Mary's blouse and listened carefully to her chest. "Her heart's stopped, I'm sure." He clenched his fist and raised it exactly four inches above her sternum, preparing to give the precordial thump that might get her heart beating again.

But the professor's claw-like fingers wrapped suddenly around his wrist, restraining Vic's arm with surprising strength. "Please do nothing rash," he said. "Chust tell, please, are you absolutely certain the lady's life has ceased?"

This old guy must be hysterical, thought Vic. The horror of the moment has robbed him of his senses. "Oliver! Help me!" he said.

But Oliver just looked at him coldly. "Answer the professor, Vic. Is Mary dead? Give us a professional medical opinion."

"You, her husband, you don't want . . ." Vic stammered. "You refuse your permission for resuscitative efforts? You don't want me to try to save her?"

"No, I don't, Vic. Just tell me if she's absolutely, clinically dead."

Vic felt he was in danger somehow. These men were both acting a little crazy, but it wasn't hysteria: a sort of bizarre cunning informed their actions. "All right, I'll examine her carefully." He palpated; he percussed; he examined Mary's pupils and tested for reflexes. "Her life functions have ceased. Her brain is receiving no oxygen," he declared at last. "To all intents and purposes, she is dead."

"You absolutely zertain?" asked the professor, his eyes gleaming impishly, as if at some grisly joke.

"Absolutely."

"Vell, dot's step one." The professor clapped his hands together vigorously. "Now for step two."

"The most important step," said Oliver.

"Berhaps zo." The professor limped out to the kitchen, and pretty soon the rattling of pans and the clinking of measuring cups could be heard.

"What's step two?" Vic whispered to Oliver.

"Why, to bring her back to life. Or rather to bring her back from the appearance of death."

"This isn't real death?"

"I certainly hope not. The professor promised me it wouldn't be."

"He promised . . . ?" A chill of horror passed down Vic's spinal cord. "You mean, he did this to her?"

"Yeah, sure. With the coffee. Hers had something special in it."

"Oh, my Lord!" Vic jumped to his feet. "This is . . . this is awful!" He wrung his hands in dismay. "That maniac has murdered your wife, and you've let him do it. Good grief, Ollie, what were you thinking of? How could you?"

"Blease, Dr. Marx, calm yourself." The professor stood in the kitchen door. "The lady is not dead, zo the term 'murder' hardly

applies. Her life functions have been suppressed to the minimum level: cannot be detected, but are still operating. The subject can survive in this state for months if necessary." He went back into the kitchen.

"Yeah, calm down, Vic. What's done is done. Now let's see if he can undo it. Okay?"

"But why, Ollie? What's the purpose of all this?"

"It's kind of an experiment. If it works on Mary, I'm going to do it on myself."

"But why?"

"To get hold of the trust funds. According to my dad's will, if I die, my wife gets the money, free and clear. The old man always had a soft spot for widows and orphans. So, assuming this stuff works, I'll take a dose and get myself declared dead; Mary gets the trust funds, then the professor revives me. Simple, huh?"

"Does Mary know about all this?"

Oliver looked uncomfortable. "Well, not yet. I figured if I told her, well . . . she might not have wanted to be the guinea pig. Though, to tell the truth, she's such an airhead, I probably could have talked her into it anyway." An insane gleam in the corner of Oliver's eye reminded Vic that he himself might be in danger here.

"If I try to leave now, will you try to stop me?"

"No. Heck, no. You believed she was dead. That's all I wanted from you. Though I'd think, as a concerned friend, you'd want to stick around and see how she comes out."

"I know how she'll come out. She's dead, poor woman."

"Still the doubting Thomas, doctor?" The professor walked into the living room, carrying a steaming cupful of liquid and some other things. "Not believing the lady is perfectly unharmed?"

"Not believing at all."

"Vell, chust wait five minutes, see vot happens." He gave the cup to Oliver. "You vill hold dis?" He knelt by Mary's head and, prying open her mouth, slid a rubber tube into her gullet. "All ready!" He attached a Pyrex funnel to the tube and poured the contents of the cup into it. "You vill mark the time," he said to Vic.

Vic kept an eye on his watch and after five minutes, to his amazement, Mary's eyelids began to flutter and she emitted a deep groan. "Chust zo!" The professor removed the tube and funnel. In ten minutes, Mary was conscious. After fifteen minutes, the men helped her to the sofa.

"We've been so awfully worried about you, Mary dear," said

Oliver. "You fainted or something." He turned to Vic with a sardonic grin. "Won't you check her over, just to make certain she's absolutely all right?"

"You can bet I will."

Vic examined her thoroughly, but aside from a slight drowsiness, she was in perfect condition. He asked her to come to his office the next day for further tests, which she did, and still he could find nothing wrong with her. Absolutely nothing.

Though he normally took no interest in such things, Vic found himself, during the next several days, avidly reading the obituaries in the local newspaper. And sure enough, about a week and a half later, he read that his old college chum, Oliver Evans, had passed away unexpectedly. Friends were asked to pay their respects at the deceased's home, where his remains would lie in state the day of the funeral.

When Vic arrived at the shabby little house, a tall, pale man in a shiny black suit met him at the door and asked him to sign a guest book. Vic noticed that except for "Professor Vladislav Xrxdnsyvitich, Ph.D.," he was the only person to have visited poor Oliver's remains. Inside, he found the living room had been rearranged but not transformed: banks of scented candles provided the only illumination, but still you could see the peeling wallpaper, the ratty carpet, the shoddy furniture pushed back against the wall. In the middle of the room a platform had been erected, draped in black cloth, and on top of it lay the most handsome piece of furniture in the place, a casket of polished wood with gleaming brass fixtures. Must have cost Ollie a bundle, thought Vic. Though I guess he can afford it now.

At the head of the casket stood Mary, dressed all in black and looking almost handsome, with her golden-brown hair beautifully coiffed, her moony face transfigured by a mournful dignity. "Hello, Vic," she whispered. "Thanks for coming."

"I couldn't stay away," he replied honestly. "Is the professor back in the kitchen?"

"Him? Oh, no. He stopped by just long enough to collect some money Ollie had owed him. Then he went away: had to catch a plane."

"Didn't he leave anything?"

"What? You mean the coffee? Sure. I'm keeping it warm on the stove. It's the oddest thing, Ollie's last request . . ."

"That the professor pour some coffee down his throat at the funeral?"

"Yes, isn't that odd? But the professor showed me how to do it. And Ollie made me promise on his deathbed, so . . ." She looked down affectionately at her recumbent husband. "He was always so full of funny ideas, right up to the very end. Gosh, I'm going to miss him."

"Did he explain it all to you? About your fainting spell and everything?"

"Well, he didn't explain anything, but he certainly asked me all kinds of questions about it."

"Like what?"

"How it felt. Whether there was any pain. The poor dear! He was so concerned I might have suffered somehow."

"And did you?"

Her eyes widened. "Oh yes, terribly. I had the most awful nightmares while I was in that faint, Vic. You can't imagine. Devils and torments and . . . just hideous things. And it all seemed so real! I swear it would have driven me crazy if it had lasted much longer than it did. Of course, I didn't tell Ollie about all that. Why trouble him on my account?"

"Why indeed?" Vic calculated with satisfaction that poor Oliver had been living through the same sort of nightmares for almost thirty-six hours now.

Mary talked absent-mindedly about all the money she'd inherited, and how gladly she'd part with it just to have Oliver alive again. And then her glance strayed to Vic's wristwatch. "Oh dear! Oh me!" With a look of anguish she ran out to the kitchen, with Vic following close behind. "Oh, my, just look at that!" She lifted a smoking pan from the stove: all that was left inside was a black, cindery substance burnt fast to the bottom. "Oh gosh, the professor's coffee is ruined." She set the scorched pan in the sink. "Well, I'll just make some fresh coffee. Poor Ollie will never know the difference, and I'll feel better, just knowing I made it myself. You think that would be okay?" she asked, turning to face Vic.

But Vic had already dashed out into the living room and was raising his fist exactly four inches above Ollie's chest, hoping but not really believing that he might be able to revive him somehow, without the professor's secret recipe for Viennese coffee.

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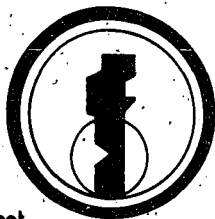
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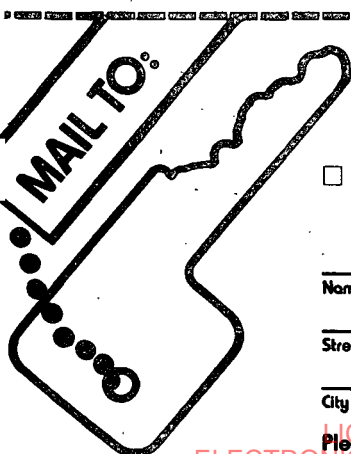


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Through the Looking Glass

by Kenneth
Gavrell

FICTION

John Stacy rolled over in his hotel bed, looked out the window, and thought he had lost his mind. Through the expansive sheet of glass he saw a blue ocean, a long stretch of beach, and miniature figures in bathing suits. Tall coconut palms swayed in the breeze like drunken chorines. A line of hotels or condominiums reached almost to the horizon.

When he had gone to sleep the night before, he had looked out at the clustered rooftops of Athens and the floodlit heights of Lykavittos Mountain.

He pushed himself violently from the bed and ran to the big window. He rubbed his hand over it in a foolish attempt to assure himself it was really glass, normal transparent glass. The tropical beach scene expanded before his disbelieving eyes.

Stacy turned back to the room; it looked about the same as it had the night before, but not quite. The bathroom seemed to have moved to the other side of

Illustration by Mark Yankus

the entranceway. And hadn't the bedcovers been green? Now they were salmon. A sudden spell of dizziness forced him to sit down heavily on the bed.

It's a dream, he thought steadily. One of those dreams that seem more real than reality.

But he knew it wasn't any dream.

I've lost my mind. The idea of a man like himself abruptly losing his mind seemed madder than what was happening to him.

I've read about cases like this. Amnesia. I've lost a period of time in my life. But why should I have amnesia? No, I don't believe it.

The room had stopped rocking. Stacy picked up the phone beside the bed. A woman's voice said: "Switchboard. Can I help you?"

"What hotel is this?" Stacy asked.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I know it sounds crazy. Just tell me what hotel this is."

"Why, the Waverly."

So far, so good. "Which Waverly?"

"The Islands Waverly, sir."

"Where are we?"

"Sir?"

"What place? What country?"

"Puerto Rico, of course." She paused. "Do you want me to send up a doctor?"

The room was rocking again.

"We're not in Greece?"

"Is this some sort of joke?" the switchboard girl said. "I'm afraid I'm very busy, sir."

Stacy lost control. "You may be busy," he said, "but I'm the one who's losing his mind!" He slammed down the phone receiver.

How much of that ouzo stuff did I drink last night? Too much. But not enough for this.

He was wearing his pajamas. His clothes were hung up on hangers. On a low table, his suitcase lay open, everything inside it as carefully packed as usual.

Stacy got up and walked into the bathroom. It looked as if it

hadn't been used. His shaving kit wasn't sitting below the mirror where he usually left it. He found it still packed in his suitcase.

If he stayed in this room any longer, he really would lose his mind. He pulled his clothes off the hangers and dressed rapidly. In his right pants pocket he found the key to the room: 816. His cigarettes were still in his shirt pocket, and he picked one out and lit it with trembling fingers. Then he opened the door and walked down the carpeted hallway to the elevators.

There were two men working behind the desk in the spacious, open lobby. One of them asked Stacy if he could be of assistance.

"I'm in Room 816." Stacy showed him the key.

"Yes, sir." The desk clerk waited expectantly.

"I'd . . . I'd like to know what time I checked in."

The clerk just looked at him.

"I need it for my company records. I'm traveling on a company schedule," Stacy said lamely.

"Yes, sir," the clerk returned doubtfully. "Let me find the card."

He came up with it quickly. "You checked in about nine A.M., sir."

"What date?"

The clerk's eyebrows were invading his hairline. "Today is the sixteenth, sir."

The sixteenth was right: yesterday in Athens had been August fifteenth. Stacy looked at his wrist watch. It said twelve twenty. He glanced at the wall clock opposite the desk; it said twelve twenty-two.

"What name do you have the room under?" he asked the clerk.

"John Stacy." The clerk turned the card so Stacy could see it. "That isn't your name?"

"That's my name, all right," Stacy said. "But that isn't my handwriting."

"I think we'd better—" the clerk began, but Stacy interrupted.

"Look, did you check me in?"

"No, sir, I came on duty at noon." He nodded at the other clerk. "So did he."

"Who would have checked me in at nine A.M.?"

The clerk studied the registration card. "Looks like José," he said. "He's off duty now. Can you tell me what this is all about?"

"I have to speak to this José," Stacy said.

"I think you'll have to speak to the supervisor first," the clerk answered.

But talking to the supervisor did no good whatsoever. He wouldn't release the other

clerk's phone number or address without a good reason, and Stacy wouldn't provide him with his reason, he was too afraid of the way his story sounded. He left the office and wandered among the tourists in the lobby until he found a restaurant called the Coconut Cafe. He sat down at a table next to a potted plant and ordered coffee and toast—the only things he thought he could keep down. When he reached for his wallet, he discovered it was gone. His passport and traveller's checks were also gone. He'd been too upset to think of looking for them before. A few small American bills that he carried in his pants pocket were still there; he used one of them to pay for his breakfast.

Stacy sipped at the coffee, but found he couldn't swallow one mouthful of toast. He would have to go to the police.

Five minutes later he made his way through the lobby, past the desk, to what looked like the main entrance. He had never been in Puerto Rico before. Half the people he saw were speaking in Spanish. Stacy had been raised in New York during the 1940's and 50's and had flirted with two years of high school Spanish. He could understand almost nothing he overheard.

He walked through the entrance like a man in a daze

(which, in fact, he was) and looked at the green lawns, the signs in Spanish, and a long curving drive. A string of taxis waited to the right. Stacy started toward the first car in line, but one farther back pulled out, shot past the others, and stopped directly in front of him.

"Taxi, sir?"

Stacy opened the rear door amidst shouts from the other drivers. The driver of his cab, a mustachioed, heavysset man in his thirties, threw a gesture out the window to his detractors.

"Where to?"

"Police . . . the police station."

"Which one?"

"I don't know—the main one."

"That's in Hato Rey."

"Wherever it is."

The cab driver torpedoed down the long drive to the street. He was soon enmeshed in heavy traffic. The American saw a park, a beach, condominiums, a yacht harbor, hotels. He heard ear-splitting air horns, loudspeakers playing Latin dance music, ubiquitous car radios. The driver made a habit of racing up to lights and then braking within inches of the car in front. Ordinarily Stacy would have complained about such driving, but today he simply absorbed it in silence.

About ten minutes after they

had started, on a crowded four lane street, the car began to make strange noises. Then it jerked violently, and finally it died. The driver was swearing in Spanish. The car rolled to a halt in the right lane close to the curb, and the driver jumped out and lifted the hood. Stacy, still in his seat, heard him banging underneath the hood, accompanying himself with a steady stream of angry monologue. Finally he walked around to Stacy's window.

"I can't fix it," he said. "I'll have to call for help."

Stacy got out and reached into his pants pocket.

"Forget it," the driver said. "No charge."

Stacy nodded and smiled thinly.

"You can walk from here," the driver suggested. "It's only about a mile, straight ahead. A big building on the right side. You can ask anybody."

Stacy started down the street. It was hot and humid; he had already sweated through his shirt. The sidewalks were narrow and dusty, and cars whizzed by him with homicidal nonchalance. As he was crossing an intersection two blocks down, a car suddenly swerved around the corner and headed straight at him. Stacy yelled and tried to leap back. The car caught him on the left leg and right

arm and hurled him to the pavement. It continued careering down the side street and whipped out of sight at the next corner.

Stacy was shaking in every limb. He dragged himself to his feet at the curb among a gathering crowd. Some of them were asking in Spanish if he was all right. He said he thought he was. Although his arm and leg hurt badly, nothing seemed to be broken.

The worst of it was that the car had seemed to be deliberately aiming at him. He couldn't believe it was an accident—any more than his going to bed in Athens and waking up thousands of miles away had been an accident.

Fifteen minutes later, having passed a big shopping center and a stadium, he found himself in front of a beflagged post office. The sweat had worked through the back of his jacket. The next large building, which looked like a monolithic fort with slits for windows, should be police headquarters. His arm and leg still throbbed with pain.

At first he thought it was a vehicle backfiring. By the time he realized what it was, the bark had exploded off a tree next to him and sliced into his cheek. The next shot grazed his already injured arm, and Stacy

was down and trying to press his face through the pavement. A figure was running toward him across the traffic. Stacy could see only his churning legs. Stacy wanted to run, but he was paralyzed. The running feet stopped beside him. Stacy heard shouts and discerned other running figures. He waited in numb terror.

"*Está bien?*" a voice above him said.

Stacy didn't reply. A hand touched his shoulder, and he pulled away violently. "Please don't!"

"Take it easy," the same voice said. "They're gone. Are you hit?"

"What?" Stacy raised his eyes to the face peering down at him. It was the face of a rather good-looking man of about forty. The man appeared concerned. In his hand he held a black revolver.

"Are you all right? Did they hit you?"

"Just grazed my arm, I think." Stacy pushed himself shakily to a half-sitting position. "What happened?" he asked.

"Two men tried to shoot you. They took off."

"Shoot me?" Stacy repeated stupidly. "Who are you?"

"My name's Bannon."

"Why are you carrying a gun?"

"I'm a private investigator."

"You saved my life."

"Their lousy shooting saved

your life. Let me look at your arm."

Stacy wearily proffered the arm.

"You're right," Bannon said. "Nothing but a laceration. Can you get up?"

"Of course," Stacy said. "This is a nightmare. I don't think I can take much more of it."

"Let's go over to police headquarters. I have some friends there. I'll bet they'd like to hear all about it."

Carlos Bannon didn't remember when he had seen a man so thoroughly rattled. For half an hour Stacy had been pouring out all his pent-up fear and frustration (Bannon sometimes acting as translator), and the two homicide detectives at Bannon's right, who had heard almost everything in their time, had never heard a story like it. One of them, a lieutenant named Romero whom Bannon had known for several years, wore an expression of scepticism from beginning to end that made his normal, workaday scepticism look like Julie Andrews' smile. The other man, a hard, wiry sergeant named López, seemed about to laugh out loud.

They had learned that the panicked, slightly overweight American in front of them was a forty-four-year-old business

machines salesman from New Jersey. He had been married once, was widowed, had no children, and had never had anything out of the ordinary happen to him until he had gone to Greece for two weeks' vacation.

He had just recounted Bannon's "rescue" of him. There was a pause.

"Well, I suppose it's ours," Romero said finally. "Attempted homicide. Are you sure that car was trying to get you?"

"Absolutely."

"What was the name of the taxi you took?" Bannon asked.

"I didn't notice. I was too upset."

"What color was it?"

"Blue, I think."

"You'd recognize the driver again?"

"Yes. He's working with them, isn't he?"

"It looks that way. Let's go back to the fairy tale part," Romero said. "Can you prove you were in Athens yesterday?"

"Check with the Athens Waverly. I was there all right."

"So you went to sleep at eleven P.M. in Athens and woke up at noon the next day here in San Juan. You think you were kidnapped by a UFO?"

"There's something like a six hour time difference between here and Athens," Stacy said. "You'd have to add that time. If they made good plane con-

nections, it could be done."

"Isn't it easier to presume you were not in Athens last night?" Romero said. "Maybe you have been in Athens, but it wasn't last night."

"My mind is all right," Stacy insisted. "And it was last night: August fifteenth."

"Then what is your explanation for all this?"

"I don't *know*. I admit it's crazy. Why should anyone want to shoot me?"

"That was my next question."

"I've never done anything to account for it. This was my first trip to Greece. And this is my first time in Puerto Rico."

Bannon interrupted. "You said 'they' took you by plane to Puerto Rico. Why 'they'? Who might they be?"

"I have no idea," Stacy said.

"But it must have been that way."

"And you just slept through all this?" Romero asked.

"I could have been drugged."

"You had to go through customs—more than once."

"Maybe they have connections in customs—maybe they pretended I was sick. How the hell do I know? There are all kinds of drugs, with all kinds of effects. Somehow they managed to do it."

"Have you ever been under psychoanalysis?" Romero asked relentlessly.

"No, no, no. Look, this isn't some classic paranoia trip, even though it sounds like it."

"We can check on a lot of this," Bannon interrupted again. "I'd like to help. I'll drive out to the airport and to the Waverly. You can have the Greek police look into the Waverly in Athens and the airport there."

Romero turned back to Stacy. "I want you to try to identify the taxi driver in our mug collection."

"Fine."

"I got a good look at one of the men firing at him," Bannon said. "I'll go through the mug shots with him."

"Okay, let's start there," Romero agreed. "It's the attempted homicide I'm interested in. I'll leave the Arabian Nights part to you."

"How do you separate them?" Bannon asked.

John Stacy rose from the uncomfortable wooden chair. "It's not much fun having people thinking you're crazy," he said.

"It's better than thinking so yourself," observed Bannon.

"I've only a couple of dollars. As I said, they took my wallet and traveller's checks."

"I presume you can replace the traveller's checks. What about calling your company in New Jersey for some funds?"

"I can try that."

"Meanwhile we'll keep you

under protective custody," Lieutenant Romero said. "You'll be a hotel guest of the Commonwealth."

By late afternoon they had given up on finding either the taxi driver or the gunman in the police files.

"He wasn't a real cab driver," Romero said. "No real cabbie would take the chance."

He told López to take Stacy to a hotel in Santurce and to have two men with him round the clock on eight hour shifts. The Athens police had already been contacted, but it would take them a while to run the leads.

"What do you think?" Romero asked Bannon as they watched Stacy leave between López and a uniformed cop.

"I saw the homicide attempt. I know he's not crazy."

"Why bring him to Puerto Rico to kill him? He's never been here—no friends, no connections here whatsoever."

"Maybe the idea was just to get him out of Greece."

"Too elaborate, too well planned—if it's all true."

"Assuming that the same people who kidnapped him are also trying to kill him, then the big question is why they didn't do it while he was in their hands for twelve or thirteen hours."

"None of it makes any sense," Romero said.

"Oh, it makes sense," said Bannon. "We just have to find out what it is."

In his jacket pocket, Bannon carried one of the Polaroid photos Stacy had allowed the police to take of him at headquarters. But the man he wanted to show it to didn't come back on duty at the Waverly until four the next morning. It was now about five in the afternoon. Bannon asked to speak to whomever was in charge.

"I'm afraid I can't do that without a good reason," the desk clerk said.

"A guest at this hotel has been involved in an attempted homicide. If you don't believe me, you can call Lieutenant Romero at Homicide in Hato Rey. Would your hotel like to get into the newspapers?"

"Wait here, please," the clerk said. He came from behind the counter and disappeared into a door down the hall. A few minutes later he returned. "Go in there," he said.

Bannon entered the office. The man in charge was a tall, blue-suited American in his late thirties. He was balding a little, but otherwise looked quite trim. He motioned Bannon to a chair in front of the desk.

"I understand you're a pri-

vate detective."

Bannon passed him his identification. The other studied it thoroughly. "Unusual name," he commented. "American father?"

"And mother from Salinas," Bannon completed his genealogy.

"What's this about one of our guests being involved in an—incident?"

"A couple of incidents actually. Do you remember seeing this face?" Bannon handed the Polaroid photo across the desk. This time no studying was necessary.

"I just talked to this man a few hours ago. He had some crazy request for the home address of the clerk who had registered him."

"I'd also like that address," Bannon said.

"We don't normally—"

"You can call Lieutenant Romero at Homicide if you like," Bannon added. "I'm working with him on this."

"I'll get the address for you."

José Torres lived in an apartment house in Miramar, neither old nor new, expensive nor government subsidized. Bannon had to poke the intercom several times before he got a reply. A sleepy and very annoyed male voice asked who it was.

"Policía," Bannon said. "*¿Tenemos que hablar con usted, Sr. Torres.*"

"*Cómo? Sobre qué?*"

"About someone you registered at the hotel this morning."

"Will it take long?"

"Not very long," Bannon said.

A grudging "*Está bien*" and the rasping buzz of the door latch. Bannon pushed through into a tiled lobby decorated with one broken-stemmed plant and took the single elevator to the fourth floor. A man in undershirt and Bermuda shorts stood at an open doorway.

"You the police?"

"Yes."

"What do you want?"

He didn't ask for any identification, and Bannon didn't show him any. Instead he pulled out the photograph of John Stacy.

"Do you remember this man?"

Torres, groggy and needing a shave, studied the snapshot.

"No. Never saw him in my life."

"You registered him in Room 816 at about nine this morning."

"Like hell I did. What's his name?"

"John Stacy."

A puzzled look came over Torres' stubbled face. "I remember the name. But I never saw this guy before."

"What did the Stacy you reg-

istered look like?"

"Damned if I remember. We run a pretty busy desk."

"But you're certain it couldn't have been this man?"

Torres looked at the picture again. "I never saw this man before in my life," he repeated.

Isla Verde International Airport is a hot, noisy, crowded place at almost any time of day, but it was worse than usual when Bannon got there, partly because of the extensive reconstruction they were doing and partly because two jumbo jets had just arrived from New York.

He had to park at the farthest fringe of the massive parking lot and dodge cars for ten minutes before he walked up the temporary plank ramp that led to the airlines counters. It took another twenty minutes to learn that a Pan Am flight had arrived from Madrid at seven fifty-five that morning, and about forty minutes more and a call to police headquarters to convince Pan Am to check their passenger list for a John Stacy. But they found him.

It seemed certain that Stacy had been on that flight. What Bannon needed now was someone who had *seen* Stacy. As he'd expected, none of the flight crew was around the airport, so he made his way to the Customs and Immigration wing of the

building. No one there had been on duty at eight in the morning either, but Bannon managed to get the phone numbers of the seven men who had been on baggage inspection for that flight. They even let him use one of their telephones. Three of the first four on the list were home, and Bannon set up appointments with them after dinner. Then he went to eat.

In Bannon's experience, it was a perverse rule of private investigating that if you had seven possibles, it was usually the last that paid off. This time the rule was broken: the first man he talked to at seven thirty that evening remembered John Stacy. He was a comically short, fat, myopic man named McDonough, who lived in a small house in Villa Nevares with an equally pudgy wife and a houseful of kids. He scarcely had to look at the photo.

"Sure I remember him. He was drunk—could hardly keep his eyes open. Two other guys were helping to steady him. It was funny."

"You're sure he was drunk?"

"That's what they said. A lot of people are the worse for wear after a flight—especially those that are afraid of flying."

"Do you remember what the two other guys looked like?"

"Just ordinary. I didn't really notice."

"Were they Puerto Ricans?"

"I think so. Actually all my attention was on the drunk."

"Do you recall *anything* else about those two men?"

"I think they both had mustaches." He chuckled. "They had their hands full."

"You wouldn't remember either of their names?" Bannon asked.

"I concentrate on suitcases, not passports. Say, what's this all about?"

"Someone tried to murder your comical drunk this afternoon. If you should happen to recall anything more about them, would you give me a call?"

Bannon wrote down his home and office phone numbers and said goodbye.

As soon as he got back to his apartment, Bannon phoned headquarters. Romero was just leaving for home.

"We're still waiting to hear from the Greek police," he said. "They'll call me whenever it comes in."

"Well, I'll be here all night. You know the number."

When Romero got back to him at eleven thirty, Bannon was just starting on his third Palo Viejo on the rocks.

"The information from Greece came in a few minutes ago. Stacy was at the Athens Wav-

erly last night. When he left, his bill was paid. He is also on the passenger list for an Olympic Airlines jet that left Greece for Madrid at one fifty-five A.M. As he said, there's a six hour time difference. It all fits."

"I'll go talk to him again in the morning," Bannon said. "He must know something that would help us."

"You mean help him," Romero corrected him.

Bannon woke at eight. He telephoned his secretary to say that he wouldn't be coming in to the office. Then he pulled his Toyota out of the lot and drove to Santurce. The American seemed glad to see him.

"Everything all right?" Bannon asked.

"Fine, except that the only privacy I have is in the bathroom."

"That's better than the privacy of being dead. The police have corroborated your story. Apparently you *were* kidnapped from Athens to San Juan. It looks like you were drugged. Whatever drug it was gave people the impression you were drunk. Now the question is why did they go to all that trouble and expense to bring you here."

The American spread his hands.

"What interests me," Bannon went on, "is that they took your passport, traveller's checks, and wallet when they left you in the Waverly. In other words, all your identification. Then they made two quick attempts to knock you off as soon as you were clear of the hotel. Time seems to have been a factor. I think they wanted to murder you before you could get in touch with the police or replace your identification."

"I'm still in the dark," Stacy said.

"Let's approach it from another angle," Bannon suggested. "You're quite sure no one would have any reason for wanting you murdered. That is to say, nothing in your past life would explain what is happening. But let's suppose their trying to kill you has nothing to do with *your* past life—it has only to do with them and their plans."

"Then why choose *me*?"

"I have a theory," Bannon said. "Sometimes in the wee hours my alpha waves hit on all cylinders. Not often enough. Now, last night I got to wondering if that taxi driver of yours might have been Greek."

"He spoke Spanish," Stacy said.

"He may be a Greek living in Puerto Rico. Perhaps he's even been here for some time. How's

your Spanish?"

"Lousy."

"Greeks and Puerto Ricans can look pretty similar."

"I've noticed that."

"Let's suppose he is Greek and the men who kidnapped you are also Greek," Bannon said. "The airport customs inspector wasn't very helpful there, but I may have steered him in the wrong direction."

"Where is all this going?" Stacy asked.

"I'm going to check your flight's passenger list for Greek names. Then I'm going to leaf through the trusty phone book."

"And then?"

"And then Lieutenant Romero is going to ask Interpol to run a few more leads in Athens."

Interpol replied by late afternoon. It was as Bannon had suspected. Two of the three Greek names from the passenger list had come up positive. One of them, a Philip Scassi, lived in Puerto Rico, as did his brother George. Although the Greek police didn't have their exact addresses, Bannon had already found a George Scassi in the San Juan telephone directory.

"Maybe they live together."

"I hope so," Romero said. "That will make things simpler. We'll go in force, cordon

off the whole block, and try to get them to surrender."

"Not very likely."

"It's worth a try. I'm getting too old for these shootouts."

The raid was set for six o'clock—dinner time, when people were likely to be at home. Romero also wanted some daylight. Bannon went to his office to pick up a gun and was back at headquarters by five thirty.

The house was in a residential section of Rio Piedras on a short street that semicircled off a larger one. Romero set up roadblocks at either end of the semicircle. Plainclothesmen were sent to cover the back and sides of the house. Then they went in with three cars.

People started coming out of their houses when the police cars stopped in a line in front of the flat-topped, concrete residence, but they quickly evaporated as Romero started in on his bullhorn. He bellowed that the house was surrounded and that the Scassi brothers had better come out with their hands up or the police would come in.

There was no answer. The house looked as still as death. Behind the three police cars, Bannon and eleven others crouched and sweated with weapons drawn.

"Miren, we've got tear gas here," Romero said through the megaphone, "as well as rifles

and shotguns. You don't have a chance."

There was a truncated little scream from a nearby house. Otherwise even the birds were silent.

"We'll give you three minutes before we come in," Romero announced. "If you have any women or children in there, you can send them out first."

A minute later the front door opened and two small children appeared, followed by a woman in her thirties. All of them were crying. The door closed behind them. Two policemen ran out and pulled the three behind the cars. The woman, hair-curlered and housedressed, was crying and gabbling in Spanish at the same time. A policeman pushed her lower behind the car.

"One minute left," Romero announced. "If you come out now, nobody will be hurt."

The door opened again, slowly. A muscular, dark-complexioned man appeared with his hands above his head. He started down the sidewalk. Behind him, a second man who looked very like him also started down with hands high. The policemen behind the cars followed their progress with their gun barrels. When the men had reached the street, a group of policemen gathered around them, handcuffs out.

"Is anyone else in there?"

Romero shouted at the brothers.

They shook their heads.

"I think they're lying," Bannon said.

"Well, there's only one way to find out," said Romero. "You four stay with them. The rest of you follow me, and keep *low*."

He, Bannon, and the others started toward the house on the run. Bannon saw the plainclothesmen closing in from the sides. Just as Romero reached the edge of the grass, a shot rang from one of the front windows, and Romero spun around as if he'd been punched. He went down. So did the others. Bullets rained against the windows, and Bannon saw at least two tear gas canisters go in. Soon clouds of gas poured from the door and windows. Romero, stretched on the grass, was swearing to himself. "Send in two more for the son of a bitch," he yelled.

But the canisters hadn't even been fired before a figure appeared at the open door. He was bent over with nausea and coughing. He staggered down the path and vomited just as he reached the street. No one else came out.

John Stacy looked up from his chair next to Lieutenant Romero's desk and watched himself come

through the door. After all that had happened, it almost seemed natural. The two men stared at each other. Except for the difference in clothes, Bannon could have sworn there was a mirror in the room.

"My God," Stacy breathed.

"They say each of us has a double somewhere in the world," Bannon observed.

"The face, the hair, the build—everything," Stacy said incredulously. "Who is he?"

"Costas Scassi," his double introduced himself. His voice, at least, sounded different.

"A kingpin in the Greek underworld," Lieutenant Romero added. "The Greek police knew he'd managed to get out of the country, but they didn't know where he'd gone. Turns out he has two brothers who live in Puerto Rico." He motioned to the two policemen with Scassi. "Take him out."

Stacy watched himself turn and leave.

"Things got too hot for him in Greece," Romero said. "A rival gangleader was trying to kill him, and the police were looking for him in connection with two murders. Scassi's the type who's always involved but impossible to convict. He's never so much as been booked for a crime until now."

Romero kneaded his bandaged shoulder gingerly. "You

can thank Bannon for figuring it out," he told Stacy, who was still looking slightly stunned. "He reasoned that the only explanation for what had happened to you was that you were a double for someone who wanted to be 'dead.' Scassi had several good reasons for wanting the police and others to think he was. It was Bannon's idea to send your photo to Greece, along with the names of the three Greek passengers on your flight."

"How did you find the brothers?" Stacy asked.

"I did what I told you," Bannon said, "I looked in the phone book."

"They've given us the whole story," Bannon added. He was smoking a cigarette, his feet on a chair, and looking quite satisfied with life in general. "One of the brothers, Philip, is the man I got a look at when they tried to shoot you. Philip was in Greece all last week, visiting relatives and seeing to some 'business' transactions for Costas. He saw you at the Waverly. At first he thought you *were* Costas. It didn't take him long to recognize the possibilities."

"Philip and an Athenian associate of Costas' kidnapped you from the hotel. They paid your bill and hustled you out to the airport where a few palms were greased to facilitate get-

ting you on the plane. You slept all the way to Puerto Rico, ostensibly because you were drunk. At Isla Verde Airport, you were still comically 'drunk,' though ambulatory. Philip registered in your name at the Waverly here. It's such a busy hotel, there was no problem getting you upstairs without anyone's noticing.

"The idea was, your own identification having been removed, to plant Costas' on you right after you were killed. By the time the police arrived, you would have been Costas Scassi. His two brothers would also have identified the body."

"We got all but one of them," Romero said. "The fourth man is already on his way home, but they'll pick him up in Athens."

"I still don't see why they didn't kill me sooner," Stacy said. "They could have done it any time."

"They had to be sure your death would not be connected with your real identity," Bannon explained. "You had to be properly checked out of the

Athens Waverly and out of Greece. You had to fly under your own name, enter Puerto Rico, be booked into a hotel here. Then you could disappear—or rather, become Costas Scassi. Who in Puerto Rico was going to connect your disappearance with a dead and buried Greek gangster?"

"It was all very neat," said Romero, "but just a little too cute."

Bannon turned to him. "One thing still bothers me. Why do you suppose Costas stayed in the house after the others came out?"

"Maybe he had some crazy hope we'd leave the house alone after his brothers gave themselves up. Or maybe he just couldn't stand the idea of finally being caught. Who knows? People do funny things in a crisis."

"Well, I think we all deserve a drink," Bannon said. "Let's go. I'm buying."

"I think," said John Stacy, "that for some time to come, the drinks are on me."

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MYSTERY CLASSIC

The Blue Cross

by G. K. Chesterton



Illustration by Hank Blaustein

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Between the silver ribbon of morning and the green glittering ribbon of sea, the boat touched Harwich and let loose a swarm of folk like flies, among whom the man we must follow was by no means conspicuous—nor wished to be. There was nothing notable about him, except a slight contrast between the holiday gaiety of his clothes and the official gravity of his face. His clothes included a slight, pale grey jacket, a white waistcoat, and a silver straw hat with a grey-blue ribbon. His lean face was dark by contrast, and ended in a curt black beard that looked Spanish and suggested an Elizabethan ruff. He was smoking a cigarette with the seriousness of an idler. There was nothing about him to indicate the fact that the grey jacket covered a loaded revolver, that the white waistcoat covered a police card, or that the straw hat covered one of the most powerful intellects in Europe. For this was Valentin himself, the head of the Paris police and the most famous investigator of the world; and he was coming from Brussels to London to make the greatest arrest of the century.

Flambeau was in England. The police of three countries had tracked the great criminal at last from Ghent to Brussels, from Brussels to the Hook of Holland; and it was conjectured that he would take some advantage of the unfamiliarity and confusion of the Eucharistic Congress, then taking place in London. Probably he would travel as some minor clerk or secretary connected with it; but, of course, Valentin could not be certain; nobody could be certain about Flambeau.

It is many years now since this colossus of crime suddenly ceased keeping the world in a turmoil; and when he ceased, as they said after the death of Roland, there was a great quiet upon the earth. But in his best days (I mean, of course, his worst) Flambeau was a figure as statuesque and international as the Kaiser. Almost every morning the daily paper announced that he had escaped the consequences of one extraordinary crime by committing another. He was a Gascon of gigantic stature and bodily daring, and the wildest tales were told of his outbursts of athletic humor; how he turned the *juge d'instruction* upside down and stood him on his head, "to clear his mind"; how he ran down the Rue de Rivoli with a policeman under each arm. It is due to him to say that his fantastic physical strength was generally employed in such bloodless though undignified scenes; his real crimes were chiefly those of ingenious and wholesale robbery. But each of his thefts was almost a new sin, and would make a story by itself. It was he who ran the great Tyrolean Dairy Company in London, with no dairies, no cows,

no carts, no milk, but with some thousand subscribers. These he served by the simple operation of moving the little milk cans outside people's doors to the doors of his own customers. It was he who had kept up an unaccountable and close correspondence with a young lady whose whole letter bag was intercepted, by the extraordinary trick of photographing his messages infinitesimally small upon the slides of a microscope. A sweeping simplicity, however, marked many of his experiments. It is said he once repainted all the numbers in a street in the dead of night merely to divert one traveller into a trap. It is quite certain that he invented a portable pillar box, which he put up at corners in quiet suburbs on the chance of strangers dropping postal orders into it.

Lastly he was known to be a startling acrobat; despite his huge figure, he could leap like a grasshopper and melt into the treetops like a monkey. Hence the great Valentin, when he set out to find Flambeau, was perfectly well aware that his adventures would not end when he had found him.

But how was he to find him? On this the great Valentin's ideas were still in process of settlement.

There was one thing which Flambeau, with all his dexterity of disguise, could not cover, and that was his singular height. If Valentin's quick eye had caught a tall apple-woman, a tall grenadier, or even a tolerably tall duchess, he might have arrested them on the spot. But all along his train there was nobody that could be a disguised Flambeau, any more than a cat could be a disguised giraffe. About the people on the boat he had already satisfied himself; and the people picked up at Harwich or on the journey limited themselves with certainty to six. There was a short railway official travelling up to the terminus, three fairly short market-gardeners picked up two stations afterwards, one very short widow lady going up from a small Essex town, and a very short Roman Catholic priest going up from a small Essex village. When it came to the last case, Valentin gave it up and almost laughed. The little priest was so much the essence of those eastern flats: he had a face as round and dull as a Norfolk dumpling; he had eyes as empty as the North Sea; he had several brown paper parcels which he was quite incapable of collecting. The Eucharistic Congress had doubtless sucked out of their local stagnation many such creatures, blind and helpless, like moles disinterred. Valentin was a sceptic in the severe style of France, and could have no love for priests. But, he could have pity for them, and this one might have provoked pity in anybody. He had a large, shabby umbrella, which constantly

fell on the floor. He did not seem to know which was the right end of his return ticket. He explained with a moon-calf simplicity to everybody in the carriage that he had to be careful, because he had something made of real silver "with blue stones" in one of his brown paper parcels. His quaint blending of Essex flatness with saintly simplicity continuously amused the Frenchman till the priest arrived (somehow) at Stratford with all his parcels, and came back for his umbrella. When he did the last, Valentin even had the good nature to warn him not to take care of the silver by telling everybody about it. But to whomever he talked, Valentin kept his eye open for someone else; he looked out steadily for anyone, rich or poor, male or female, who was well up to six feet; for Flambeau was four inches above it.

He alighted at Liverpool Street, however, quite conscientiously secure that he had not missed the criminal so far. He then went to Scotland Yard to regularize his position and arrange for help in case of need; he then lit another cigarette and went for a long stroll in the streets of London. As he was walking in the streets and squares beyond Victoria, he paused suddenly and stood. It was a quaint, quiet square, very typical of London, full of an accidental stillness. The tall, flat houses round looked at once prosperous and uninhabited; the square of shrubbery in the center looked as deserted as a green Pacific islet. One of the four sides was much higher than the rest, like a dais; and the line of this side was broken by one of London's admirable accidents—a restaurant that looked as if it had strayed from Soho. It was an unreasonably attractive object, with dwarf plants in pots and long, striped blinds of lemon yellow and white. It stood specially high above the street, and in the usual patchwork way of London, a flight of steps from the street ran up to meet the front door almost as a fire escape might run up to a first floor window. Valentin stood and smoked in front of the yellow-white blinds and considered them long.

The most incredible thing about miracles is that they happen. A few clouds in heaven do come together into the staring shape of one human eye. A tree does stand up in the landscape of a doubtful journey in the exact and elaborate shape of a note of interrogation. I have seen both these things myself within the last few days. Nelson does die in the instant of victory; and a man named Williams does quite accidentally murder a man named Williamson; it sounds like a sort of infanticide. In short, there is in life an element of elfin coincidence which people reckoning on the prosaic may perpetually miss. As it has been well expressed in the paradox

of Poe, wisdom should reckon on the unforeseen.

Aristide Valentin was unfathomably French; and the French intelligence is intelligence specially and solely. He was not "a thinking machine"; for that is a brainless phrase of modern fatalism and materialism. A machine only *is* a machine because it cannot think. But he was a thinking man, and a plain man at the same time. All his wonderful successes, that looked like conjuring, had been gained by plodding logic, by clear and commonplace French thought. The French electrify the world not by starting any paradox, they electrify it by carrying out a truism. They carry a truism so far—as in the French Revolution. But exactly because Valentin understood reason, he understood the limits of reason. Only a man who knows nothing of motors talks of motoring without petrol; only a man who knows nothing of reason talks of reasoning without strong, undisputed first principles. Here he had no strong first principles. Flambeau had been missed at Harwich; and if he was in London at all, he might be anything from a tall tramp on Wimbledon Common to a tall toastmaster at the Hôtel Métropole. In such a naked state of nescience, Valentin had a view and a method of his own.

In such cases he reckoned on the unforeseen. In such cases, when he could not follow the train of the reasonable, he coldly and carefully followed the train of the unreasonable. Instead of going to the right places—banks, police stations, rendezvous—he systematically went to the wrong places; knocked at every empty house, turned down every cul de sac, went up every lane blocked with rubbish, went round every crescent that led him uselessly out of the way. He defended this crazy course quite logically. He said that if one had a clue this was the worst way; but if one had no clue at all it was the best, because there was just the chance that any oddity that caught the eye of the pursuer might be the same that had caught the eye of the pursued. Somewhere a man must begin, and it had better be just where another man might stop. Something about that flight of steps up to the shop, something about the quietude and quaintness of the restaurant, roused all the detective's rare romantic fancy and made him resolve to strike at random. He went up the steps, and, sitting down by the window, asked for a cup of black coffee.

It was halfway through the morning, and he had not breakfasted; the slight litter of other breakfasts stood about on the table to remind him of his hunger; and, adding a poached egg to his order, he proceeded musingly to shake some white sugar into his coffee,

thinking all the time about Flambeau. He remembered how Flambeau had escaped, once by a pair of nail scissors, and once by a house on fire; once by having to pay for an unstamped letter, and once by getting people to look through a telescope at a comet that might destroy the world. He thought his detective brain as good as the criminal's, which was true. But he fully realized the disadvantage. "The criminal is the creative artist; the detective only the critic," he said with a sour smile, and lifted his coffee cup to his lips slowly, and put it down very quickly. He had put salt in it.

He looked at the vessel from which the silvery powder had come; it was certainly a sugar basin; as unmistakably meant for sugar as a champagne bottle for champagne. He wondered why they should keep salt in it. He looked to see if there were any more orthodox vessels. Yes, there were two salt cellars quite full. Perhaps there was some specialty in the condiment in the salt cellars. He tasted it; it was sugar. Then he looked round at the restaurant with a refreshed air of interest, to see if there were any other traces of that singular artistic taste which puts the sugar in the salt cellars and the salt in the sugar basin. Except for an odd splash of some dark fluid on one of the white-papered walls, the whole place appeared neat, cheerful, and ordinary. He rang the bell for the waiter.

When that official hurried up, fuzzy-haired and somewhat bleary-eyed at that early hour, the detective (who was not without an appreciation of the simpler forms of humor) asked him to taste the sugar and see if it was up to the high reputation of the hotel. The result was that the waiter yawned suddenly and woke up.

"Do you play this delicate joke on your customers every morning?" inquired Valentin. "Does changing the salt and sugar never pall on you as a jest?"

The waiter, when this irony grew clearer, stammeringly assured him that the establishment had certainly no such intention; it must be a most curious mistake. He picked up the sugar basin and looked at it; he picked up the salt cellar and looked at that, his face growing more and more bewildered. At last he abruptly excused himself, and hurrying away, returned in a few seconds with the proprietor. The proprietor also examined the sugar basin and then the salt cellar; the proprietor also looked bewildered.

Suddenly the waiter seemed to grow inarticulate with a rush of words.

"I zink," he stuttered eagerly, "I zink it is those two clergymen."

"What two clergymen?"

"The two clergymen," said the waiter, "that threw soup at the wall."

"Threw soup at the wall?" repeated Valentin, feeling sure this must be some Italian metaphor.

"Yes, yes," said the attendant excitedly, and pointing at the dark splash on the white paper; "threw it over there on the wall."

Valentin looked his query at the proprietor, who came to his rescue with fuller reports.

"Yes, sir," he said, "it's quite true, though I don't suppose it has anything to do with the sugar and salt. Two clergymen came in and drank soup here very early, as soon as the shutters were taken down. They were both very quiet, respectable people; one of them paid the bill and went out; the other, who seemed a slower coach altogether, was some minutes longer getting his things together. But he went at last. Only, the instant before he stepped into the street he deliberately picked up his cup, which he had only half emptied, and threw the soup slap on the wall. I was in the back room myself, and so was the waiter; so I could only rush out in time to find the wall splashed and the shop empty. It didn't do any particular damage, but it was confounded cheek; and I tried to catch the men in the street. They were too far off though; I only noticed they went round the corner into Carstairs Street."

The detective was on his feet, hat settled and stick in hand. He had already decided that in the universal darkness of his mind he could only follow the first odd finger that pointed; and this finger was odd enough. Paying his bill and clashing the glass doors behind him, he was soon swinging round into the other street.

It was fortunate that even in such fevered moments his eye was cool and quick. Something in a shop front went by him like a mere flash; yet he went back to look at it. The shop was a popular greengrocer and fruiterer's, an array of goods set out in the open air and plainly ticketed with their names and prices. In the two most prominent compartments were two heaps, of oranges and of nuts respectively. On the heap of nuts lay a scrap of cardboard, on which was written in bold, blue chalk, "Best tangerine oranges, two a penny." On the oranges was the equally clear and exact description. "Finest Brazil nuts, 4d. a lb." M. Valentin looked at these two placards and fancied he had met this highly subtle form of humor before, and that somewhat recently. He drew the attention of the red-faced fruiterer, who was looking rather sullenly up and down the street, to this inaccuracy in his advertisements. The

fruiterer said nothing, but sharply put each card into its proper place. The detective, leaning elegantly on his walking cane, continued to scrutinize the shop. At last he said: "Pray excuse my apparent irrelevance, my good sir, but I should like to ask you a question in experimental psychology and the association of ideas."

The red-faced shopman regarded him with an eye of menace; but he continued gaily, swinging his cane. "Why," he pursued, "why are two tickets wrongly placed in a greengrocer's shop like a shovel hat that has come to London for a holiday? Or in case I do not make myself clear, what is the mystical association which connects the idea of nuts marked as oranges with the idea of two clergymen, one tall and the other short?"

The eyes of the tradesman stood out of his head like a snail's; he really seemed for an instant likely to fling himself upon the stranger. At last he stammered angrily: "I don't know what you 'ave to do with it, but if you're one of their friends, you can tell 'em from me that I'll knock their silly 'eads off, parsons or no parsons, if they upset my apples again."

"Indeed?" asked the detective, with great sympathy. "Did they upset your apples?"

"One of 'em did," said the heated shopman; "rolled 'em all over the street. I'd 'ave caught the fool but for havin' to pick 'em up."

"Which way did these parsons go?" asked Valentin.

"Up that second road on the left-hand side, and then across the square," said the other promptly.

"Thanks," said Valentin, and vanished like a fairy. On the other side of the second square he found a policeman, and said: "This is urgent, constable; have you seen two clergymen in shovel hats?"

The policeman began to chuckle heavily. "I 'ave sir; and if you arst me, one of 'em was drunk. He stood in the middle of the road that bewildered that—"

"Which way did they go?" snapped Valentin.

"They took one of them yellow buses over there," answered the man; "them that go to Hampstead."

Valentin produced his official card and said very rapidly: "Call up two of your men to come with me in pursuit," and crossed the road with such contagious energy that the ponderous policeman was moved to almost agile obedience. In a minute and a half the French detective was joined on the opposite pavement by an inspector and a man in plain clothes.

"Well, sir," began the former, with smiling importance; "and what may—?"

Valentin pointed suddenly with his cane. "I'll tell you on the top of that omnibus," he said, and was darting and dodging across the tangle of the traffic. When all three sank panting on the top seats of the yellow vehicle, the inspector said: "We could go four times as quick in a taxi."

"Quite true," replied their leader placidly, "if we only had an idea of where we were going."

"Well, where *are* you going?" asked the other, staring.

Valentin smoked frowningly for a few seconds; then, removing his cigarette, he said: "If you *know* what a man's doing, get in front of him; but if you want to guess what he's doing, keep behind him. Stray when he strays; stop when he stops; travel as slowly as he. Then you may see what he saw and may act as he acted. All we can do is to keep our eyes skinned for a queer thing."

"What sort of a queer thing do you mean?" asked the inspector.

"Any sort of a queer thing," answered Valentin, and relapsed into obstinate silence.

The yellow omnibus crawled up the northern roads for what seemed like hours on end; the great detective would not explain further, and perhaps his assistants felt a silent and growing doubt of his errand. Perhaps, also, they felt a silent and growing desire for lunch, for the hours crept long past the normal luncheon hour, and the long roads of the North London suburbs seemed to shoot out into length after length like an infernal telescope. It was one of those journeys on which a man perpetually feels that now at last he must have come to the end of the universe, and then finds he has only come to the beginning of Tufnell Park. London died away in dragged taverns and dreary scrubs, and then was unaccountably born again in blazing high streets and blatant hotels. It was like passing through thirteen separate vulgar cities all just touching each other. But though the winter twilight was already threatening the road ahead of them, the Parisian detective still sat silent and watchful, eyeing the frontage of the streets that slid by on either side. By the time they had left Camden Town behind, the policemen were nearly asleep; at least, they gave something like a jump as Valentin leapt erect, struck a hand on each man's shoulder, and shouted to the driver to stop.

They tumbled down the steps into the road without realizing why they had been dislodged; when they looked round for enlightenment they found Valentin triumphantly pointing his finger towards a window on the left side of the road. It was a large window, forming part of the long façade of a gilt and palatial public-house.

it was the part reserved for respectable dining, and labelled "Restaurant." This window, like all the rest along the frontage of the hotel, was of frosted and figured glass, but in the middle of it was a big, black smash, like a star in the ice.

"Our cue at last," cried Valentin, waving his stick; "the place with the broken window."

"What window? What cue?" asked his principal assistant. "Why, what proof is there that this has anything to do with them?"

Valentin almost broke his bamboo stick with rage.

"Proof!" he cried. "Good God! The man is looking for proof! Why, of course, the chances are twenty to one that it has *nothing* to do with them. But what else can we do? Don't you see we must either follow one wild possibility or else go home to bed?" He banged his way into the restaurant, followed by his companions, and they were soon seated at a late luncheon at a little table, and looking at the star of smashed glass from the inside. Not that it was very informative to them even then.

"Got your window broken, I see," said Valentin to the waiter, as he paid his bill.

"Yes, sir," answered the attendant, bending busily over the change, to which Valentin silently added an enormous tip. The waiter straightened himself with mild but unmistakable animation.

"Ah, yes, sir," he said. "Very odd thing, that, sir."

"Indeed? Tell us about it," said the detective with careless curiosity.

"Well, two gents in black came in," said the waiter; "two of those foreign parsons that are running about. They had a cheap and quiet little lunch, and one of them paid for it and went out. The other was just going out to join him when I looked at my change again and found he'd paid me more than three times too much. 'Here,' I says to the chap who was nearly out of the door, 'you've paid too much.' 'Oh,' he says, very cool, 'have we?' 'Yes,' I says, and picks up the bill to show him. Well, that was a knockout."

"What do you mean?" asked his interlocutor.

"Well, I'd have sworn on seven Bibles that I'd put 4s. on that bill. But now I saw I'd put 14s., as plain as paint."

"Well?" cried Valentin, moving slowly, but with burning eyes, "and then?"

"The parson at the door he says, all serene, 'Sorry to confuse your accounts, but it'll pay for the window.' 'What window?' I says. 'The one I'm going to break,' he says, and smashed that blessed

pane with his umbrella."

All the inquirers made an exclamation; and the inspector said under his breath: "Are we after escaped lunatics?" The waiter went on with some relish for the ridiculous story:

"I was so knocked silly for a second, I couldn't do anything. The man marched out of the place and joined his friend just round the corner. Then they went so quick up Bullock Street that I couldn't catch them, though I ran round the bars to do it."

"Bullock Street," said the detective, and shot up that thoroughfare as quickly as the strange couple he pursued.

Their journey now took them through bare brick ways like tunnels; streets with few lights and even with few windows; streets that seemed built out of the blank backs of everything and everywhere. Dusk was deepening, and it was not easy for the London policemen to guess in what exact direction they were treading. The inspector, however, was pretty certain that they would eventually strike some part of Hampstead Heath. Abruptly one bulging and gas lit window broke the blue twilight like a bull's-eye lantern; and Valentin stopped an instant before a little garish sweet stuff shop. After an instant's hesitation he went in; he stood amid the gaudy colours of the confectionery with entire gravity and bought thirteen chocolate cigars with a certain care. He was clearly preparing an opening; but he did not need one.

An angular, elderly young woman in the shop had regarded his elegant appearance with a merely automatic inquiry; but when she saw the door behind him blocked with the blue uniform of the inspector, her eyes seemed to wake up.

"Oh," she said, "if you've come about that parcel, I've sent it off already."

"Parcel!" repeated Valentin; and it was his turn to look inquiring.

"I mean the parcel the gentleman left—the clergyman gentleman."

"For goodness' sake," said Valentin, leaning forward with his first real confession of eagerness, "for Heaven's sake tell us what happened exactly."

"Well," said the woman, a little doubtfully, "the clergymen came in about half an hour ago and bought some peppermints and talked a bit, and then went off towards the Heath. But a second after, one of them runs back into the shop and says, 'Have I left a parcel?' Well, I looked everywhere and couldn't see one; so he says, 'Never mind; but if it should turn up, please post it to this address,' and he left me the address and a shilling for my trouble. And sure

enough, though I thought I'd looked everywhere, I found he'd left a brown paper parcel, so I posted it to the place he said. I can't remember the address now; it was somewhere in Westminster. But as the thing seemed so important, I thought perhaps the police had come about it."

"So they have," said Valentin shortly. "Is Hampstead Heath near here?"

"Straight on for fifteen minutes," said the woman, "and you'll come right out on the open." Valentin sprang out of the shop and began to run. The other detectives followed him at a reluctant trot.

The street they threaded was so narrow and shut in by shadows that when they came out unexpectedly into the void common and vast sky they were startled to find the evening still so light and clear. A perfect dome of peacock green sank into gold amid the blackening trees and the dark violet distances. The glowing green tint was just deep enough to pick out in points of crystal one or two stars. All that was left of the daylight lay in a golden glitter across the edge of Hampstead and that popular hollow which is called the Vale of Health. The holiday-makers who roam this region had not wholly dispersed: a few couples sat shapelessly on benches; and here and there a distant girl still shrieked in one of the swings. The glory of heaven deepened and darkened around the sublime vulgarity of man; and standing on the slope and looking across the valley, Valentin beheld the thing which he sought.

Among the black and breaking groups in that distance was one especially black which did not break—a group of two figures clerically clad. Though they seemed as small as insects, Valentin could see that one of them was much smaller than the other. Though the other had a student's stoop and an inconspicuous manner, he could see that the man was well over six feet high. He shut his teeth and went forward, whirling his stick impatiently. By the time he had substantially diminished the distance and magnified the two black figures as in a vast microscope, he had perceived something else; something which startled him, and yet which he had somehow expected. Whoever was the tall priest, there could be no doubt about the identity of the short one. It was his friend of the Harwich train, the stumpy little *curé* of Essex whom he had warned about his brown paper parcels.

Now, so far as this went, everything fitted in finally and rationally enough. Valentin had learned by his inquiries that morning that a Father Brown from Essex was bringing up a silver cross with sapphires, a relic of considerable value, to show some of the

foreign priests at the congress. This undoubtedly was the "silver with blue stones"; and Father Brown undoubtedly was the little greenhorn in the train. Now there was nothing wonderful about the fact that what Valentin had found out Flambeau had also found out; Flambeau found out everything. Also there was nothing wonderful in the fact that when Flambeau heard of a sapphire cross he should try to steal it; that was the most natural thing in all natural history. And most certainly there was nothing wonderful about the fact that Flambeau should have it all his own way with such a silly sheep as the man with the umbrella and the parcels. He was the sort of man whom anybody could lead on a string to the North Pole; it was not surprising that an actor like Flambeau, dressed as another priest, could lead him to Hampstead Heath. So far the crime seemed clear enough; and while the detective pitied the priest for his helplessness, he almost despised Flambeau for condescending to so gullible a victim. But when Valentin thought of all that had happened in between, of all that had led him to his triumph, he racked his brains for the smallest rhyme or reason in it. What had the stealing of a blue and silver cross from a priest from Essex to do with chucking soup at wallpaper? What had it to do with calling nuts oranges, or with paying for windows first and breaking them afterwards? He had come to the end of his chase; yet somehow he had missed the middle of it. When he failed (which was seldom), he had usually grasped the clue, but nevertheless missed the criminal. Here he had grasped the criminal, but still he could not grasp the clue.

The two figures that they followed were crawling like black flies across the huge green contour of a hill. They were evidently sunk in conversation, and perhaps did not notice where they were going; but they were certainly going to the wilder and more silent heights of the Heath. As their pursuers gained on them, the latter had to use the undignified attitudes of the deer stalker, to crouch behind clumps of trees and even to crawl prostrate in deep grass. By these ungainly ingenuities the hunters even came close enough to the quarry to hear the murmur of the discussion, but no word could be distinguished except the word "reason" recurring frequently in a high and almost childish voice. Once, over an abrupt dip of land and a dense tangle of thickets, the detectives actually lost the two figures they were following. They did not find the trail again for an agonizing ten minutes, and then it led round the brow of a great dome of hill overlooking an amphitheatre of rich and desolate sunset scenery. Under a tree in this commanding yet neglected spot

was an old ramshackle wooden seat. On this seat sat the two priests still in serious speech together. The gorgeous green and gold still clung to the darkening horizon; but the dome above was turning slowly from peacock green to peacock blue, and the stars detached themselves more and more like solid jewels. Mutely motioning to his followers, Valentin contrived to creep up behind the big branching tree, and, standing there in deathly silence, heard the words of the strange priests for the first time.

After he had listened for a minute and a half, he was gripped by a devilish doubt. Perhaps he had dragged the two English policemen to the wastes of a nocturnal heath on an errand no saner than seeking figs on thistles. For the two priests were talking exactly like priests, piously, with learning and leisure, about the most aerial enigmas of theology. The little Essex priest spoke the more simply, with his round face turned to the strengthening stars; the other talked with his head bowed, as if he were not even worthy to look at them. But no more innocently clerical conversation could have been heard in any white Italian cloister or black Spanish cathedral.

The first he heard was the tail end of one of Father Brown's sentences, which ended: "... what they really meant in the Middle Ages by the heavens being incorruptible."

The taller priest nodded his bowed head and said:

"Ah, yes, these modern infidels appeal to their reason; but who can look at those millions of worlds and not feel that there may well be wonderful universes above us where reason is utterly unreasonable?"

"No," said the other priest; "reason is always reasonable, even in the last limbo, in the lost borderland of things. I know that people charge the Church with lowering reason, but it is just the other way. Alone on earth, the Church makes reason really supreme. Alone on earth, the Church affirms that God Himself is bound by reason."

The other priest raised his austere face to the spangled sky and said:

"Yet who knows if in that infinite universe—?"

"Only infinite physically," said the little priest, turning sharply in his seat, "not infinite in the sense of escaping from the laws of truth."

Valentin behind his tree was tearing his fingernails with silent fury. He seemed almost to hear the sniggers of the English detectives whom he had brought so far on a fantastic guess only to listen

to the metaphysical gossip of two mild old parsons. In his impatience he lost the equally elaborate answer of the tall cleric, and when he listened again it was again Father Brown who was speaking:

"Reason and justice grip the remotest and the loneliest star. Look at those stars. Don't they look as if they were single diamonds and sapphires? Well, you can imagine any mad botany or geology you please. Think of forests of adamant with leaves of brilliants. Think the moon is a blue moon, a single elephantine sapphire. But don't fancy that all that frantic astronomy would make the smallest difference to the reason and justice of conduct. On plains of opal, under cliffs cut out of pearl, you would still find a noticeboard, 'Thou shalt not steal.'"

Valentin was just in the act of rising from his rigid and crouching attitude and creeping away as softly as might be, felled by the one great folly of his life. But something in the very silence of the tall priest made him stop until the latter spoke. When at last he did speak, he said simply, his head bowed and his hands on his knees:

"Well, I still think that other worlds may perhaps rise higher than our reason. The mystery of heaven is unfathomable, and I for one can only bow my head."

Then, with brow yet bent and without changing by the faintest shade his attitude or voice, he added:

"Just hand over that sapphire cross of yours, will you? We're all alone here, and I could pull you to pieces like a straw doll."

The utterly unaltered voice and attitude added a strange violence to that shocking change of speech. But the guarder of the relic only seemed to turn his head by the smallest section of the compass. He seemed still to have a somewhat foolish face turned to the stars. Perhaps he had not understood. Or, perhaps, he had understood and sat rigid with terror.

"Yes," said the tall priest, in the same low voice and in the same still posture, "yes, I am Flambeau."

Then, after a pause, he said:

"Come, will you give me that cross?"

"No," said the other, and the monosyllable had an odd sound.

Flambeau suddenly flung off all his pontifical pretensions. The great robber leaned back in his seat and laughed low but long.

"No," he cried; "you won't give it me, you proud prelate. You won't give it me, you little celibate simpleton. Shall I tell you why you won't give it me? Because I've got it already in my own breast-pocket."

The small man from Essex turned what seemed to be a dazed face in the dusk, and said, with the timid eagerness of "The Private Secretary":

"Are—are you sure?"

Flambeau yelled with delight.

"Really, you're as good as a three-act farce," he cried. "Yes, you turnip, I am quite sure. I had the sense to make a duplicate of the right parcel, and now, my friend, you've got the duplicate, and I've got the jewels. An old dodge, Father Brown—a very old dodge."

"Yes," said Father Brown, and passed his hand through his hair with the same strange vagueness of manner. "Yes, I've heard of it before."

The colossus of crime leaned over to the little rustic priest with a sort of sudden interest.

"You have heard of it?" he asked. "Where have you heard of it?"

"Well, I mustn't tell you his name, of course," said the little man simply. "He was a penitent, you know. He had lived prosperously for about twenty years entirely on duplicate brown paper parcels. And so, you see, when I began to suspect you, I thought of this poor chap's way of doing it at once."

"Began to suspect me," repeated the outlaw with increased intensity. "Did you really have the gumption to suspect me just because I brought you up to this bare part of the heath?"

"No, no," said Brown with an air of apology. "You see, I suspected you when we first met. It's that little bulge up the sleeve where you people have the spiked bracelet."

"How in Tartarus," cried Flambeau, "did you ever hear of the spiked bracelet?"

"Oh, one's little flock, you know!" said Father Brown, arching his eyebrows rather blankly. "When I was a curate in Hartlepool, there were three of them with spiked bracelets. So, as I suspected you from the first, don't you see, I made sure that the cross should go safe, anyhow. I'm afraid I watched you, you know. So at last I saw you change the parcels. Then, don't you see, I changed them back again. And then I left the right one behind."

"Left it behind?" repeated Flambeau, and for the first time there was another note in his voice beside his triumph.

"Well, it was like this," said the little priest, speaking in the same unaffected way. "I went back to that sweet shop and asked if I'd left a parcel, and gave them a particular address if it turned up. Well, I knew it hadn't; but when I went away again it did. So, instead of running after me with that valuable parcel, they have

sent it flying to a friend of mine in Westminster." Then he added rather sadly: "I learnt that, too, from a poor fellow in Hartlepool. He used to do it with handbags he stole at railway stations, but he's in a monastery now. Oh, one gets to know, you know," he added, rubbing his head again with the same sort of desperate apology. "We can't help it, being priests. People come and tell us these things."

Flambeau tore a brown paper parcel out of his inner pocket and rent it in pieces. There was nothing but paper and sticks of lead inside it. He sprang to his feet with a gigantic gesture, and cried:

"I don't believe you. I don't believe a bumpkin like you could manage all that. I believe you've still got the stuff on you, and if you don't give it up—why, we're all alone, and I'll take it by force!"

"No," said Father Brown simply, and stood up also; "you won't take it by force. First, because I really haven't still got it. And, second, because we are not alone."

Flambeau stopped in his stride forward.

"Behind that tree," said Father Brown, pointing, "are two strong policemen and the greatest detective alive. How did they come here, do you ask? Why, I brought them, of course! How did I do it? Why, I'll tell you if you like! Lord bless you, we have to know twenty such things when we work among the criminal classes! Well, I wasn't sure you were a thief, and it would never do to make a scandal against one of our own clergy. So I just tested you to see if anything would make you show yourself. A man generally makes a small scene if he finds salt in his coffee; if he doesn't, he has some reason for keeping quiet. I changed the salt and sugar, and *you* kept quiet. A man generally objects if his bill is three times too big. If he pays it, he has some motive for passing unnoticed. I altered your bill, and *you* paid it."

The world seemed waiting for Flambeau to leap like a tiger. But he was held back as by a spell; he was stunned with the utmost curiosity.

"Well," went on Father Brown, with lumbering lucidity, "as you wouldn't leave any tracks for the police, of course somebody had to. At every place we went to, I took care to do something that would get us talked about for the rest of the day. I didn't do much harm—a splashed wall, spilt apples, a broken window; but I saved the cross, as the cross will always be saved. It is at Westminster by now. I rather wonder you didn't stop it with the Donkey's Whistle."

"With the what?" asked Flambeau.

"I'm glad you've never heard of it," said the priest, making a face. "It's a foul thing. I'm sure you're too good a man for a Whistler. I couldn't have countered it even with the Spots myself; I'm not strong enough in the legs."

"What on earth are you talking about?" asked the other.

"Well, I did think you'd know the Spots," said Father Brown, agreeably surprised. "Oh, you can't have gone so very wrong yet!"

"How in blazes do you know all these horrors?" cried Flambeau.

The shadow of a smile crossed the round, simple face of his clerical opponent.

"Oh, by being a celibate simpleton, I suppose," he said. "Has it never struck you that a man who does next to nothing but hear men's real sins is not likely to be wholly unaware of human evil? But, as a matter of fact, another part of my trade, too, made me sure you weren't a priest."

"What?" asked the thief, almost gaping.

"You attacked reason," said Father Brown. "It's bad theology."

And even as he turned away to collect his property, the three policemen came out from under the twilight trees. Flambeau was an artist and a sportsman. He stepped back and swept Valentin a great bow.

"Do not bow to me, *mon ami*," said Valentin, with silver clearness. "Let us both bow to our master."

And they both stood an instant uncovered, while the little Essex priest blinked about for his umbrella.

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Only \$25.00 for 20 Words or Less
\$1.25 each additional word

Capitalized words add—40¢ per word

SAVE 15% WITH 3 CONSECUTIVE MONTHS
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DEADLINE: Copy and payment must be in by the 5th day of the third preceding month for issue in which ad is to appear.

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15% Savings with 3 Consecutive Months Discount

(a) Multiply one ad total \$ _____ x 3 = \$ _____
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(c) Total amount for 3 ads \$ _____
(Example: One 20 word ad \$25.00 x 3
months = \$75.00 x .85 = \$63.75)

\$ _____ is enclosed for _____ insertion(s) in the _____ issue(s) _____ Heading _____

(FOR ADDITIONAL WORDS ATTACH SEPARATE SHEET)

(1) \$25.00	(2) \$25.00	(3) \$25.00	(4) \$25.00	(5) \$25.00
(6) \$25.00	(7) \$25.00	(8) \$25.00	(9) \$25.00	(10) \$25.00
(11) \$25.00	(12) \$25.00	(13) \$25.00	(14) \$25.00	(15) \$25.00
(16) \$25.00	(17) \$25.00	(18) \$25.00	(19) \$25.00	(20) \$25.00
(21) \$26.25	(22) \$27.50	(23) \$28.75	(24) \$30.00	(25) \$31.25
(26) \$32.50	(27) \$33.75	(28) \$35.00	(29) \$36.25	(30) \$37.50

HOW TO COUNT WORDS: Name and address must be included in counting the number of words in your ad. Each initial or number counts as 1 word; Mark Holly, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017: 7 WORDS. Zip codes are not counted. Phone #: 2 Words. Symbols used as keys are charged for. City or State count as 1 word each; Garden City, New York: 2 words. Abbreviations such as C.O.D., F.O.B., P.O., U.S.A., 7x10, 35mm count as 1 word. (P.O. Box 145 count as 3 words) Webster's International Unabridged Dictionary will be used as our authority for spelling, compound words, hyphens, abbreviations, etc. Please make checks payable to ALFRED HITCHCOCK MAGAZINE.

THE STORY THAT WON



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The March Mysterious Photograph contest (photo above) was won by Mat Rapacz of St. Johnsville, New York. Honorable mentions go to Matt DeMarco of Ventura, California; Joan Turchik of Des Plaines, Illinois; Cindy Roberts of Evansville, Indiana; Garold R. Riggs of Lansing, Michigan; Margaret Robinson of Columbus, Ohio; William L. Burr of Rowland Heights, California; Erik Bundy, APO New York; M. L. Pearce of Dartmouth, Nova Scotia; and Robert Gray of Rutland, Vermont.

FIRST ASSIGNMENT

by Mat Rapacz

Nobody thought I had the brains or the guts, but here I am on my very first assignment. Lord, I hope I don't blow it. Shouldn't have had those two drinks—or was it three? Fool, don't even think about them! You've got to keep your head clear, keep your head clear. Here comes my contact. Let me think. If he lights his pipe with his hat off, I give the woman the phony microfilm. If he starts to fill his pipe with his hat on, I give her the real microfilm and follow her . . . or is it the other way around? No, no, I was right the first time. Let's see, if he lights his pipe with his hat on. I . . . I . . . I lead her into the alley and kill her. Whew! I almost didn't remember. Wait! What if he starts to fill his pipe with his hat on? . . . Got it. I hand her the rose as a signal that we are to meet later at the alternate rendezvous point. Okay, he's got his hat on and he's going for his tobacco pouch. This spy business is going to be easier than I thought, a real piece of cake. I just take the rose and, take . . . the . . . ROSE? I grabbed the wrong flower! What the hell would giving her a tulip mean? I wonder if it's too late to go to medical school?

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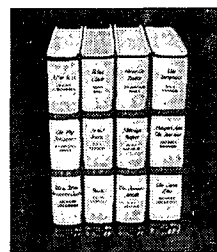
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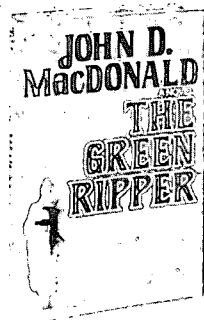
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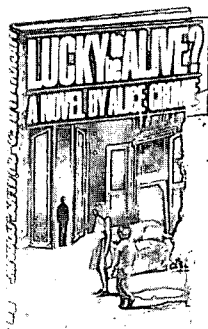
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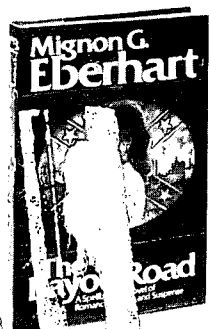
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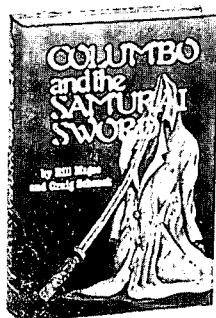
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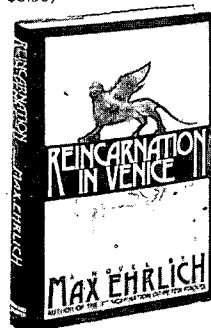
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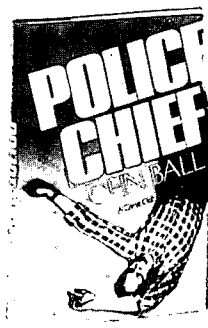
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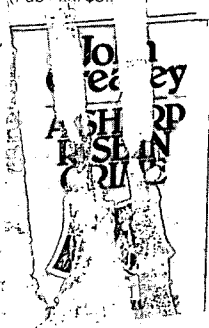
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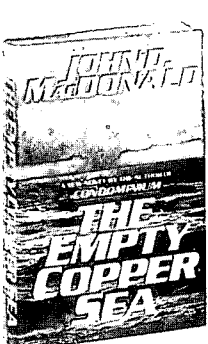
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